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IN THE CLUTCHES OF A MAN-EATING APE!

Deep in the underground lair of the evil hobgoblins, you and your companions have hidden inside a cart to escape detection.

Suddenly a large, hairy paw reaches down and grabs you by the throat. You feel your body being lifted into the air and find yourself staring straight into the eyes of a carnivorous ape!

You must decide what to do immediately. Your magic-user friend, Kyrel, might be able to cast some kind of a spell, or your huge fighter friend, Drawg, might be able to overpower the ape. They glance at you anxiously, waiting for you to say something.

What will you say?

1) "Kyrel, use your magic!" If this is what you choose to cry out, turn to page 140.

2) "Drawg, attack!" If this is your choice, turn to page 156.

Whatever your decision is, you are certain to find danger and adventure as you seek
THE DRAGON'S RANSOM

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An ENDLESS QUEST® Book #16

The Dragon's Ransom

BY LAURA FRENCH

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS™ ADVENTURE BOOK

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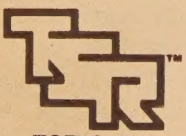

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To the Grand Oon,
with loyalty and affection

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ou are about to set off on an adventure in which YOU will meet many dangers—and face many decisions. YOUR choices will determine how the story turns out. So be careful . . . you must choose wisely!

Do not read this book from beginning to end! Instead, as you are faced with a decision, follow the instructions and keep turning to the pages where your choices lead you until you come to an end. At any point, YOUR choice could bring success—or disaster!

You can read THE DRAGON'S RANSOM many times, with many different results, so if you make an unwise choice, go back to the beginning and start again!

Good luck on YOUR adventure!

In this story, you are Loendal, a young cleric who lives in the usually peaceful land of Oon. The peace is seldom broken, except once a month by the insistent rumblings of the fierce Golden Dragon of Oon, who protects your land from outside invasion—for a price. As the story begins, the Golden Dragon's roars pierce the air as you hurry to the palace. . . .

"The dragon speaks!" shouts the sentry from his post high up in the guard tower on the outer wall.

You freeze in your tracks and listen. Yes, there it is—the distant but fearsome rumbling of the Golden Dragon of Oon.

The dragon lives in a cave at the entrance to the land of Oon. From the cave, the dragon guards the land—and guards it very well. All the people in surrounding countries know how well protected Oon is, and so they always leave it alone.

The people of Oon have but one problem. Every month, the dragon begins to speak. His rumblings, which grow louder and louder, are a demand for gold and precious jewels in return for its protection. The dragon is not greedy; it does not ask for more ransom than the people of Oon can supply. But the dragon is not patient, either. Its rumblings grow louder and louder until a pouch of gold is left outside its cave.

You stand for another moment, listening, and the dragon speaks again, reminding the people of Oon that it is once again time for its ransom to be paid.

No one knows what would happen if the dragon were not paid. Perhaps it would breathe fire on the land of Oon. Perhaps it would leave its lair to seek riches elsewhere, leaving the land open to attack. Perhaps it would let anyone who gave it gold freely pass to attack Oon.

No one knows what would happen if the dragon were not paid, because the dragon is ALWAYS paid.

You hurry on toward the palace of Oon. It is because of the ransom of the dragon that you have been summoned.

To get the ransom, the Grand Oon sends out treasure seekers from time to time. They seek what gold and precious stones they can take with honor—although that does not always mean without a fight. Not all the treasure seekers return to the land. But enough do to keep the treasure chest of Oon supplied.

The Golden Dragon speaks again, and you quicken your steps. Soon this month's ransom must be paid. That will empty the treasury of gold.

You, Loendal, have been chosen to seek the next ransom!

Polter, the cleric to whom you are apprenticed, told you of this news just last night. You're still not sure you believe it, especially when you remember your mere thirteen years and the blond hair, round blue eyes, and dusting of freckles around your nose that make you look even younger. You straighten your back and walk tall, for your height is an advantage—as long as no one notices that it comes from long, spindly legs.

Still, you are not such a very strange choice to seek the next ransom. Have you not already mastered the Command Spell that makes other creatures obey your orders? (Although,

to be honest—and a cleric must always be honest—the command works well only on dim-witted creatures.) Can you not Detect Evil most of the time, by seeing a greenish glow around the head of the evil one? Can you not Remove Fear from others, making fighters brave in battle, thieves more daring, and even magic-users less fearful?

The Grand Oon knows all this, as he knows about all the people of Oon. He respects it, too, for he, too, is a cleric. He is worlds above you in skill and wisdom, it is true, but he IS a cleric, as you will be someday.

For all these reasons, you have been chosen as the next treasure seeker for the land of Oon. Your heart pounds in your chest as you walk up the steep steps to the palace.

You enter the room where the Grand Oon sits on a carved wooden throne. There are no gold and jewels for him. Those must go to please the dragon. Still, the Grand Oon looks like the wise and beloved ruler he is. His eyes are blue and kindly yet far-seeing. His white hair curls around his head like a halo. He wears his simple cloth robe with as much dignity as if it were of spun gold.

"Hail, Loendal!" the Grand Oon says. "How goes thy schooling?"

"Very well, sir," you tell him. "Polter is an excellent teacher."

"You could, perhaps, request homework from Polter before you go. But studying and treasure seeking do not seem to go together."

Then his blue eyes suddenly become serious.

"Young Loendal, you have been chosen to go to the dwelling of the hobgoblins in the land of Tesk, where a great treasure is said to be hidden. Polter will give you a map to study before you go, but you may not take the map with you. If you are captured, there must be nothing to betray your mission."

You nod your understanding. But your mind is caught back on the pictures that formed in your mind when you heard the word "captured." You try not to see them.

The Grand Oon continues: "I am a cleric. That is, perhaps, the main reason I chose an apprentice cleric like yourself to seek our ransom. I do believe, however, that the natural wisdom of the cleric—what some might call 'common sense'—is the best weapon against the unexpected things that you must encounter on a hunt such as this. I also believe that your love of good and hatred of evil will bring us an honorable treasure. That is important to me."

You nod eagerly, determined to prove the wisdom of the Grand Oon's choice.

"You may, however, wish for other weapons to protect you on your quest. Since some of the most valuable are not for the cleric to possess, you may wish to take with you some companions who are permitted such weapons."

The Grand Oon nods to his right, and for the first time you notice three young men standing near the throne.

"Let me introduce you," says the Grand Oon. "First, there is Drawg, the fighter. He is skilled beyond his years with dagger and sword."

The first young man stares at you sullenly. He is about your age, but he seems to be twice your size, both in width and height. The hair that peeks out from under his helmet is jet black. His eyes are steely blue. His nose is flat against his face, as if it has been broken many times. His head sits squarely on his broad shoulders, with no neck to separate them.

"Second," the Grand Oon continues, "there is Kyrel, the magic-user."

The second young man bows to you nervously, twisting the long sleeve of his robe in his hands. Kyrel is as tall as you are but seems only half as wide. He looks as though a strong wind would snap him in two.

"Show Loendal some magic," the Grand Oon commands.

Kyrel clears his throat, closes his eyes, and holds one hand out, palm down. Instantly, a seering flame shoots from his fingertips.

Since Kyrel's hand is pointed in your direction, the flame hits the marble floor inches from your feet. "Hey!" you shout.

Kyrel opens his eyes, breaking the spell. He clasps the offending fingertips under his other arm.

There is a sound of laughter from the third young man. You turn from Kyrel to look at him.

"Kyrel also has the power to Comprehend Language," the Grand Oon concludes calmly. "Finally, there is Pantel."

The third young man is a head shorter than you are and no bigger around than Kyrel. But he does not look frail. He looks as tough as lean meat—and just as hard to swallow.

"Pantel is a most talented young thief," the Grand Oon says. "He is agile, quick, and daring."

Pantel smiles boldly up at his ruler and then turns his gaze back at you.

"Each of your companions has an important skill," the Grand Oon says. "But each of them also has a dangerous weakness. Drawg is quick to fight but slow to think. Kyrel works his magic well, but he is not brave, although he wants to be. Pantel is good at acts of cunning, but he does not always care as deeply as he should whether the acts themselves are good."

The three young men all look at their feet as the ruler speaks.

"You may find these three to be valuable allies," the Grand Oon continues, "but only if you can draw on their skills and avoid being harmed by their weaknesses. And you must prove to them your ability to make wise decisions. If you think that power is beyond you, you had best go on your quest alone. The decision is yours to make."

The Grand Oon stops speaking and folds his arms under the sleeves of his robe. The room

becomes very quiet, and you know that your ruler will let the silence go unbroken until you have made your decision.

You turn to look at the three who will become your companions and share your glory—and your danger—if you but say the word.

Drawg's hand is upon his sword, and he looks at you steadily but without expression. Is he trying to remind you how handy he will be in battle? Or is he warning you that you will have a fight on your hands should you decide to go alone?

Kyrel is wringing the sleeve of his robe again. From his trembling chin and saucerlike eyes, it's difficult to tell whether he wants you to let him go or make him stay at home.

Mischief lurks in Pantel's eyes—as if he knows something that he has not told you and will not tell you until it suits his purpose.

These, then, will be your companions if you say the word. Or, if you say another word, you will be free to go alone.

1) If you decide to go alone, turn to page 21.

2) If you think the three will be helpful on the quest, turn to page 41.

Just as Pantel and the swimmer reach the edge of the water, you shout, "Wait! I'll swim to the island with you and wait for you there while you dive."

"Then come on," says the thief. The swimmer says nothing but dives almost noiselessly into the lake. Pantel follows.

The water is clear and cool and feels good after walking a hot, dusty path all morning.

Opening your eyes under water, you see Pantel ahead of you and the stranger ahead of him. No, there he is to your right. Well, there's someone there—in fact, lots of someones! You're surrounded!

Nixies! Years ago, Polter taught you about these underwater creatures who live in dwellings of seaweed guarded by large fishes. They are not evil, which is why you didn't Detect Evil in the swimmer. But they delight in enslaving humans to do their bidding. They keep them for a year under the effects of a water-breathing spell.

Even as that fact comes back to you, you are aware of the cool rush of liquid coming into your lungs. You exhale the water and breathe in again, just to be sure.

Then you know, and terror fills you! For you and for Pantel, there will be no more treasure-hunting for one long year. Unless Drawg and Kyrel can do something to rescue you. . . .

THE END

All the questions you have about the stranger suddenly overwhelm you—who is he? Why was such a polished gentleman traveling alone? Where did he come from? Where did he go? Why did he stop here? Why was he dressed all in black?

"Come on," you say suddenly. "I don't think we're safe here. Let's get on our way. We'll stop somewhere else for the night."

"You're crazy!" exclaims Pantel.

"Drawg sleep!" growls the fighter, yawning.

"I do regard rest as a requirement," says Kyrel.

The complaints continue, but when you agree to camp again very quickly, the others follow, grumbling all the way.

Only a mile or so away you find a pleasant grassy spot with shelter under an overhanging rock. It looks ideal to you.

"Bed down, fellows."

Cheers quickly give way to snores, and early in the morning you're on your way again.

Please turn to page 122.

You do not know how powerful the hobgoblin guard might be, so you decide not to risk letting Drawg fight him. You do know, however, that the guard will probably not be terribly bright. That gives your magic a good chance.

Steeling yourself, you dart into the entrance. The hobgoblin's small, beady eyes widen as it catches sight of you.

"Sleep!" you hiss.

The creature's eyes droop and then close. Its head slumps forward, and it begins to snore gently. You signal the others. With Drawg's help, you drag the guard out of the entryway and into the bushes just beyond the opening.

You enter the lair and look around you in the torchlight. To your right is a tunnel that slopes rapidly downward. To your left, the dry channel of an ancient riverbed winds away in an irregular path.

You hear a scrape, scrape, scrape noise coming from the tunnel on the right. Quickly hiding behind some nearby rocks, you and your companions wait in suspense as the scrape, scrape, scrape grows louder. Finally, a huge creature comes into view. It is ugly and hairy, with arms that hang almost to the floor. One of Polter's lessons pops into your mind—hobgoblins often keep carnivorous apes. The peculiar scraping noise is caused by the creature dragging rough cloth sacks behind it as it walks.

The ape does not notice you. It continues on down the larger path to the left.

The usually silent Kyrel suddenly stammers, "M-Maybe another g-guard is due to come soon."

"You're probably right," you confess. "We'd better get away from the entrance."

Although you have a strong urge to get out, you know you really have only two choices:

1) Follow the ape into the old river channel; turn to page 55.

2) Or go to the right down the sloping tunnel from which the ape came; turn to page 99.

Somewhere in the back of your mind you recall Polter saying, "It's always wise to be cautious." Well, so be it.

"We're going home," you say.

"What?" Pantel says in disbelief.

"Why?" Drawg demands.

"B-But the wound is not overwhelming," Kyrel says.

"I won't risk your safety," you reply.

And so you return to Oon without the treasure. But that does not mean you go without reward. That comes when Polter, after examining Kyrel, comes to you and says, "The scratch on Kyrel's neck is no ordinary scratch. It is from the fang of a werewolf!"

Immediately you remember the elegant, inquisitive stranger who ate his supper at your campfire the night Kyrel was attacked. Now you know where your feelings of unease came from.

Your simple healing skills do not work on such evil wounds. You cannot prevent the wounded one from becoming a werewolf, too.

"Is Kryel—" You break off in horror

"He will be fine," Polter says, smiling. "But in another forty-eight hours, it would have been too late."

Your knees grow weak, and you sink thankfully into a chair. You acted in time to save Kyrel's life. And there is still time to find the dragon's treasure.

THE END

Once more you scan the three . . . and you don't like what you see: Drawg, the bully; Kyrel, the coward; Pantel, the thief.

You turn to the Grand Oon. "I wish to undertake the journey alone." You carefully avoid looking at the three young men, not wanting to know their reactions to your decision.

"Very well," the Grand Oon says evenly. "You will go alone. Your journey will commence in two days time."

Relieved that the Grand Oon is not angry at your decision, you bow to him and leave.

The next two days are busy ones. You gather together a suit of leather armor, some dried meat and flat bread, a waterbag, and a bedroll in which you place a change of clothing and a few silver coins.

You also spend hours studying the map with Polter, your teacher, learning each turn, each landmark, so that you will be able to find your way from memory to the hobgoblin dwelling in Tesk.

Polter also gives you his final advice: "Your memory may fail you. The map itself may be faulty. Unexpected things will happen. That is where your wisdom comes in. Wisdom is your gift, Loendal. If you but use it, all will be well."

Finally, at dawn on the third day, the gates of Oon draw closed behind you. You are on your way.

Only a short distance from home, you approach the entrance to the Golden Dragon's cave. This month's ransom has been paid. But

just as you are even with the entrance to the cave, a loud noise makes you jump. Gooseflesh rises on your scalp, and you freeze in your tracks. Then you laugh—it was a snore, not a roar, that you heard.

Past the dragon's cave, the single path that leads from Oon narrows. Mountains rise on either side. The path twists and turns as it makes its way through the mountains.

The path is relatively flat and easy to walk, though. You must remind yourself of your important mission and keep yourself from dawdling along the way.

So little is your mind upon the dangers of your quest that you nearly walk to your death without realizing it!

Rounding a curve in the path, you suddenly come upon a huge and hideous troll! You freeze in your tracks at the sight of it, unable to move for what seems like years but is probably less than a second. Then you jump back into a cleft in the rock.

You close your eyes and force yourself to breathe slowly. All the time you are waiting for an evil hand to reach out and grab you by the throat.

Once you have made your heart stop racing, you realize that the troll didn't see you. You peer out of the cleft in the rock and see that it is still there. Looking more carefully at the scene, you discover that the troll is on a bridge that stretches over a deep crevasse. It is the age-old strategy of the cunning troll, to

capture those who try to cross a bridge.

Pulling back into your shelter in the rock, you think what to do. What may seem to be many choices are actually but a few.

Fighting the troll would be sure death for you, a cleric, not a fighter. Drawg, perhaps, could kill this troll, but you cannot.

Sneaking past the troll is impossible, as well. The chasm is too wide to jump across, and the mountains are too steep to climb. Even if you waited until the troll was asleep, the sound of your feet on the wooden boards would waken it. Pantel, perhaps, could act with such stealth, but you cannot.

What you can do is use your magic. You can command the troll to freeze. Then, while it is held rigid by the spell, you can run past it to safety.

You lick your lips, which have suddenly become dry. Using the magic spell will take courage. The troll might be too smart to fall under the spell—although that is doubtful. The bigger risk is that it will not stay under the spell long enough for you to get safely away.

There is one other choice, you realize. You can go back to the land of Oon and tell your ruler that you have changed your mind about wanting companions on the journey. With Pantel's cunning and Drawg's strength and with Kyrel's magic added to your own, surely there would be a way to deal with the troll.

You feel sickened by the idea of going home

and admitting that you were wrong to go alone. You feel sickened, as well, as you imagine once again the troll's huge and hairy hands around your throat.

You shift uncomfortably as a stone digs into your back. The time has come to decide. Will you confront the troll, or will you return to the land of Oon?

1) If you want to use your magic to try to get past the troll, turn to page 31.

2) If you decide to go back to Oon and ask the others to join you, turn to page 40.

The ransom of the Golden Dragon is what's important, not your own heroism, you remind yourself. So you decide to head for home and get help.

Strangely, it's not disappointment but excitement that fills you as you head toward Oon. You know now what a grand treasure awaits your return. Taking that treasure will not be without peril, but once it is taken—and you are sure it will be—the kingdom of Oon will be safe forever.

And as long as the kingdom exists, your name will be remembered and honored as the greatest treasure seeker Oon has ever known.

THE END

There is some danger in waiting for dark, you know. The hobgoblins, with their ability to see in the dark, will be able to see you better than you can see them. On the other hand, the danger of leaving the cave and running into a huge party of hobgoblins returning from a raid is not an appetizing thought either.

"We'll wait here until dark," you whisper to the others. You settle down in a small alcove and make yourselves as comfortable as you can on the floor of the cave.

It has been many hours since you have eaten, but the excitement, combined with the sight of the strings of raw meat that the ape was eating, keep you from feeling hungry.

You quietly remove your pack, take a few sips from your waterbag, and pass it around to your companions.

"Water good, Loendal," Drawg says. "Rest good."

"Rest in this rocky rubble is not realistic," Kyrel says, drawing himself into a nervous ball.

"Pipe down, pipsqueak," Pantel says mockingly. "Those apes can hear a pebble drop—and there must be hundreds of them in here."

You sit for several hours as quietly as you can, shifting your position from time to time to keep your muscles from growing stiff. You estimate that darkness must be well underway when suddenly you hear footsteps down the tunnel, footsteps of more than one being.

You gesture to your comrades to pull well

back into the alcove. Then you wait, your heart in your throat.

Three hobgoblin guards, fully armed and carrying bedrolls, emerge from the darkness. They do not see you because they are talking among themselves. As they enter the cave, the ape greets them with squeals of delight.

"Did you miss us, Juk?" one of the hobgoblins asks. "Did you miss your friends?" It wrestles playfully with the ape. The play looks like a fight to the death, but it is, you realize, these creatures' idea of fun.

The three hobgoblins finally settle down in front of the fire, with the ape nearby.

"Not such bad duty, this. Warm and dry, anyway," one of them says.

"I'd rather be hot and sweating and swinging my mace at some orc pig's head," says a second.

"Or kicking in the door of a treasure room," adds a third.

"Like we did that time in the land of Obela," says the first.

The other two chuckle at the memory. They retell the story of the bloody battle in such detail that you feel your stomach start to churn. You cover your ears so you can no longer distinguish the hobgoblins' words.

Finally, there is silence. You peer out and see that the ape and two hobgoblins have curled up and gone to sleep, but the third hobgoblin is sitting awake in front of the fire.

Your stomach sinks as you realize that wait-

ing for dark has not increased your chances of taking the treasure. It has worsened them. Further waiting will not help, either—unless you wait for several days and chart all the comings and goings of the apes and guards. No—you must either head for home and report what you have seen to the Grand Oon or explore further in order to give him a fuller report that might help another, later treasure seeker.

Either way, you will probably be returning home without treasure. But you cannot dwell upon that disappointment. The best way to put it out of your mind is to be on your way.

But which way?

1) Out of the lair and home? Turn to page 26.

2) Farther into hobgoblins' lair? Turn to page 62.

Why did you study all those years with Polter, learning your magic spells, if not to use them at times such as this? You are suddenly determined to give your magic a try.

Again you breathe deeply, calming yourself, gathering the power that you know lies within you. It will take all the power you can muster to make the Command Spell strong enough, and to make it last long enough for you to get safely past the troll.

You step out from the cleft and stand squarely in the path, holding your chin up and your shoulders back. You hope you look braver than you feel.

You advance toward the troll. You must wait until the last possible moment to cast the spell, to make more time for you to get away. Your heart in your throat, you take step after step, and still the troll does not see or hear or sense you. You feel your spirits rising. Surely a creature this dim-witted will fall easily under your spell.

Finally the troll's piglike nose begins to twitch. It has picked up your scent. It turns to face you. A look of evil glee crosses its face as it sees a victim approaching. It makes grunting noises, daring you to come closer. Then, eagerly, it begins to walk toward you. Its hands reach out, ready to wrap around your throat.

You wait until you are so close that you can see the yellow fire in its eyes. Then, keeping your voice low and strong, you say, "Freeze."

The troll stops in its tracks, its arms outstretched, one corner of its lips still curled in a sneer. Its eyes turn leaden as the fire goes out behind them.

But the fire will not stay out forever, you know. You must hurry past. The bridge is so narrow and the troll is so huge that you almost have to touch it as you go past. Already you can smell the horrible odor of the creature.

You lower your head and begin to run as fast as you can. You see the troll's feet inches from your own as you pound past. Finally the other end of the bridge is in sight.

And then you hear it—the noise that chills your blood. A snort first, followed by a louder grunt. Next a scream of rage as the troll, fully awake, sees its prey escaping.

Then you hear the pounding of the troll's feet on the boards of the bridge. And you know that it is the last sound you'll ever hear. . . .

THE END

You shake your head. "You must tell me more about your plan if I am to follow it," you say to Pantel.

He shrugs. "No can do. We do it your way, then."

"We will wait until just before daybreak," you say. "That will be the quietest time, the time when the treasure is least likely to be guarded." As you say it, you hope with all your might that it is true.

"Then we will steal back to the treasure room. Each of us will take a sack and put in it only what he can carry quickly and without resting until we are far, far away from the hobgoblin lair. Do you understand that?" You let your gaze linger on Pantel for an extra moment.

Drawg, Kyrel, and finally—not without some hesitation—Pantel nod agreement. There is nothing else to say. There is only the long wait for daybreak.

You watch the moon move across the sky until you know that it is only minutes before the first rays of the sun will appear. Peering around the corner, you are pleased to see that the hobgoblin guard has not been replaced. That means no one as yet has discovered that there have been intruders in the lair.

Stealthily, you make your way back down the river channel to the treasure room.

To your surprise and delight, the room stands unguarded. Without speaking, each of you grabs a sack and begins to load it.

When four of the sacks are filled and the necks securely knotted, you leave the treasure room and make your way along the channel.

You see no one, and your escape seems almost laughably easy. But as you approach the entryway, you hear footsteps. You hurry outside and dart around to the side of the lair, taking cover under the bushes once more.

The footsteps continue to approach. Then there is a call in the hobgoblin tongue—a short call that you guess is the name of the guard.

The call is repeated more loudly, and then there is more shouting as an alarm is given.

"Run!" you hiss.

In the brightening dawn, you lead your party along the same route by which you approached, again circling the hill.

You have gone only a short distance when you realize your progress is very slow.

"What's the matter? " you ask.

"Heavy!" groans Kyrel, in the shortest comment you've ever heard from him.

In spite of your warnings, your comrades have taken more than they can easily run with. You, too, you must admit, could not go very far carrying the heavy sack.

"We'll have to hide the treasure," you say urgently, "fast!" You fall to your knees beside a low-growing bush and begin digging with your hands in the soft dirt.

"Wait!" Pantel hisses. "My plan will still work. We can take all this gold and more!"

You stop digging for a moment, rubbing your

wrists where dry weeds at the base of the shrub have pricked them.

You know Pantel will not tell you what his plan is. And, in truth, there is no longer time. You must make a decision immediately. Hide the treasure and run. Or go with the unknown and unknowable plan of the thief.

1) If you choose to try Pantel's plan, turn to page 68.

2) If you decide to hide the gold and head for home, turn to page 102.

The vault can mean only one thing—treasure. A trapdoor can mean many things, including treasure or a safe means of escape. It might also mean danger, of course. For that reason, you decide to send the best fighter in your party down first.

"Drawg fight," he tells you.

"I hope you won't have to!" you tell him. "If there is anyone down there, try to come back without raising an alarm. But fight if you must."

Drawg's heavy, flat face brightens at your final command. He lowers himself down into the darkness beneath the trapdoor.

You, Pantel, and Kyrel wait, breathing in the musty dampness that comes up through the open door.

You hear a heavy, muffled thud. Was that the sound of Drawg tripping and falling? You dare not call down the ladder to find out. All you can do is wait.

You're beginning to really worry when you hear the thud-thud of heavy footsteps coming toward the ladder.

In the dim light that reaches the ladder, you see the heavy, armored figure climbing, and you breathe a sigh of relief.

"What did you find? Is there treasure?" you whisper down to the climbing fighter.

The single grunt is the kind of reply you expect from the fighter. He steps out onto the floor beside you and finally raises his head. Then what you see is unexpected—the flat-

tened pink snout and beady eyes of an orc!

Kyrel lets out a squeak, and Pantel mutters something under his breath. You say nothing. But you all back away.

The orc looks very pleased with itself as it draws its sword and walks toward you. It should be pleased—your only protection against an armed and armored orc is still somewhere in the tunnel below. The trapdoor was, indeed, a trap.

THE END

You do not have the courage either to fight alone or to use your magic. Sadly, you decide you must return home. You feel a flare of anger rising in yourself—anger at yourself.

Then you remember the words of Polter, your teacher: "Wisdom is your gift," he said. "If you but use it, all will be well."

Returning home to get companions for your journey is not the bravest thing to do, but it is certainly the wisest. You are following the path down which your fate has sent you. You know suddenly that this is the right thing to do.

You have reached THE END of this adventure. Go to page 41 to begin another adventure.

Once more you scan the three: Drawg, the strong; Kyrel, the talented; Pantel, the agile. And you know that their special qualities will be useful to you on the journey.

"I wish to take them as companions on my journey," you tell the Grand Oon. Carefully you avoid seeing what reactions your decision will produce on the faces of the others.

"Very well," the Grand Oon says calmly. "The four of you will go together. Your journey will commence in two days time."

Wishing the Grand Oon had told you what he thinks of your decision, you bow and leave.

The next two days are busy ones. You gather together your supplies—food, clothing, herbs, a few silver coins, a bedroll, and a suit of leather armor.

You also spend hours studying a map with Polter, learning each turn, each landmark so that you will be able to find your way to Tesk from memory.

At dawn on the third day, the gates of the land of Oon close behind you.

None of you has been outside the land of Oon before. You look around you, amazed at the rocky peaks that stretch as far as the eye can see. The path on which you walk is a narrow ribbon running through the mountains.

You pass the cave of the Golden Dragon. The sounds coming from inside are peaceful snores. They remind you, however, of the fearful rumblings that will begin if the ransom cannot be paid.

You walk on past the cave until you notice that Pantel is no longer with you. Doubling back, you see the young thief about to enter the mouth of the dragon's cave.

Running to him, you say in a soft voice, "That isn't a good idea. The dragon might be angry if you disturb its slumber."

"It won't even know I'm there," Pantel replies.

"It might. And if anything happens to you, it will delay the start of the journey," you argue.

"I don't need a nursemaid, Loendal. If I don't come out, go on without me," Pantel says with a shrug. He takes a step farther into the cave.

"Halt!" you order. Reason has not worked to stop Pantel. But stop him you must, even if it requires force. "The Grand Oon put me in charge of this journey. I say we go on our way—all of us—now!"

Somewhat to your surprise, Pantel shrugs again and steps out of the cave. The two of you rejoin the others on the path.

The rest of the morning passes peacefully. Even Kyrel finally begins to relax and enjoy the sunshine and the interesting new sights.

In the lead as you round a curve in the path, you freeze at the sight of a troll ahead of you.

"Get back!" you whisper urgently. And you quickly herd the others into a cleft in the rock where you can't be seen by the monster.

Once your group is safely hidden, you peek out from the cleft in the rock. The troll is still

there. Studying the scene more carefully, you realize that the troll is on a bridge that stretches across a deep crevasse. It's the age-old trick of the troll—trying to capture those who want to cross.

"We're not going to fall for that!" you say, pulling back into the safety of the cleft. "But what shall we do?"

"I can zip right past it," Pantel whispers in your ear. "I'll crawl to the edge of the bridge, swing under, and go hand over hand across the beams, right under its feet. And it won't even know it!" Pantel's eyes gleam at the thought of such prowess.

"And how would you get the rest of us across?" you ask. Pantel shrugs.

"Fight," Drawg growls softly. "Kill troll!"

There is silence while you yourself wonder whether you should use your magic. You can command the troll to freeze, and then, while it is held rigid by the spell, lead the others in a run to safety.

You lick your lips, which have suddenly become dry. Using the magic spell will take courage. The troll might be too smart to fall under the spell—although that is doubtful. The bigger risk is that it will not stay under the spell long enough for you and the others to get safely away.

The thought of the magic and the long silence that surrounds you reminds you that Kyrel has not yet spoken. You turn to look at him.

"P-Prestidigitation m-might prevail," Kyrel says, not so much volunteering as saying what's expected of him.

Again you look at each of your three companions. Then you lean around the cleft of the rock to take another look at the troll.

1) If you want Kyrel to use his magic, turn to page 74.

2) If you decide to have Drawg fight the troll, turn to page 53.

You finally decide that earning your companions' confidence in you as a leader must be more important right now than giving in to your foolish fears. You will let them sleep—but you will do your best to stay awake and keep guard, just in case.

You spread out your bedroll, and the others quickly do the same. Their snores soon tell you that your companions are asleep, but you have to stay awake. You recite verses Polter taught you; you try to remember mathematical formulas the two of you worked out together; you list important dates in Oon's history. You try anything you can think of to keep your mind awake.

In spite of your efforts, you doze. But suddenly you are wide awake, not sure what wakened you.

Listening in the dark, you hear a faint rustling noise. Peering through the darkness, you think you see a large dark form standing over Kyrel.

"Get away!" you shout, wishing you had time to put magic in the command. You rise and dash at the shadow.

The creature gives a doglike howl and runs away into the darkness.

You hurry over to where Kyrel is lying. Pantel and Drawg quickly join you. The magician is scarcely awake—he blinks, rubs his eyes, and asks, "What woke me? I wonder if I felt a wound." He puts his hand to his throat, then asks, "Loendal, why are you watching me?"

"A wild animal attacked you," you tell him. "Are you all right?"

Kyrel looks at you wide-eyed. "I—I know not," he says.

"Move your arms and legs," you tell him. When he obeys without showing signs of pain, you examine him more closely. There is a small wound on his throat, but that is all. You know that if you had wakened seconds later, there would have been much more.

You put your hands on the scratch and chant the magic words of the healing spell. It seems that you have to concentrate a lot longer than usual for the wound to begin to heal.

Before the wound heals, the first rays of the sun start to appear.

"I'm fine," says Kyrel. "Let's get on our way." Surely if the cowardly magician says that he's all right, it must be true.

But if Kyrel's injury is more than the simple skin wound that you healed, he needs to be seen by someone with more healing skill than yours—and you're getting farther and farther from home.

What do you say?

1) "Come on, my friends. Let's take Kyrel home and have the healer look at him." Turn to page 19.

2) "Well, let's get going again. We've still got a treasure to find." Turn to page 129.

Looking at Drawg, you remember that the Grand Oon sent Drawg along with you because of his fighting ability. You might as well take advantage of it.

"Take him, Drawg!" you command. The fighter straightens his shoulders, thrusts his chin forward, and advances on the entrance to the cave.

You hear the hobgoblin guard grunt in surprise when it sees the fighter. You hear Drawg's answering grunt, a challenge to do battle.

The creak of armor, the clank of metal on metal, and the thud of a body hitting a body and the walls of the cave tell you that the fighting is intense. The sounds do not tell you who is winning.

Then Drawg emerges, breathing hard and sporting an angry red bruise above his left eyebrow.

"Are you all right?" you ask.

"You should see the other fellow," he replies happily. And he leads you to where a large hobgoblin lies sprawled on its back inside the entryway.

Words of thanks must wait for someplace safer. Instead, you lay your hand for a moment on Drawg's forehead, using a spell to heal the ugly bruise.

By the light of torches mounted on the walls, you survey the situation. If you were to make a diagram of what you see from where you stand, it would look like the letter Y. The

entryway is the base of the Y. Two paths angle out from that base.

The one on the right is a tunnel that has clearly been dug by living creatures. Pillars and beams support the ceiling. Not much higher than you are tall and not very wide, it angles downward steeply.

The path to the left is a natural formation, perhaps the channel left by an ancient underground river. It is fairly wide but irregularly shaped.

A faraway noise filters through the stillness. Scrape, scrape, scrape—it repeats rhythmically, over and over again. As you wait, it grows louder and then louder still. Someone is approaching from the tunnel on the right. You must act quickly to avoid discovery.

You motion your companions back outside. Signaling Drawg to help, you drag the hobgoblin guard out of the entryway and into the bushes just beyond the opening. You hope that anyone who comes will think the guard is merely out on a routine patrol.

Then you hide where you can watch for the creature that is approaching.

A creature it is, huge and hairy, with arms that dangle to the ground. It is, you realize, one of the carnivorous apes that hobgoblins sometimes keep as pets and beasts of burden.

The scrape, scrape, scrape noise is caused by rough cloth sacks the ape is dragging behind it. The ape's rolling gait gives the noise its rhythmic stop and start.

The creature looks neither left nor right. It passes by without noticing the absence of the guard or the presence of four pairs of eyes peering at it from the edge of the entrance.

When the creature is gone, you ponder what to do. The ape brought something out of the tunnel and is taking it down the dry river channel. What the something is, you don't know.

You do know that you can expect to run into the ape if you go down the channel to the left. What awaits you down the tunnel to the right you don't know.

1) If you decide to go down the sloping tunnel to the right, turn to page 99.

2) If you choose to follow the ape down the dry riverbed to the left, turn to page 55.

Suddenly, the monster waiting on the bridge looks awfully big and fierce, and you're glad to have a fighter with you.

"All right, Drawg, it's up to you."

From the look of happiness in his eyes, you would think you had offered him a treasure, instead of asking him to risk his life.

"Wait here," Drawg says. He advances on the troll, who seems not to hear him coming. Drawg is almost to the edge of the bridge before the troll's nose begins to twitch. The monster turns on Drawg and utters a menacing growl. The only noise that comes from the fighter is the sound of his sword being drawn from its scabbard.

Drawg stops, feet planted. The troll begins to move forward, slowly at first and then faster. Its arms are outstretched, ready to wrap themselves around Drawg's throat.

When the troll's hands are but inches away from Drawg's neck, there is a sudden swoosh, swoosh and the sword flies through the air. Drawg severs both the troll's arms above the elbow. The arms bounce along the bridge and come to rest on the path on the far side.

The troll bellows in rage. Drawg draws his sword back for the final thrust. But before he can make it, both of the troll's arms slither back and reattach themselves.

You had heard that trolls had the horrifying power to put themselves back together, but you've never seen it happen before. Aghast, you watch as once again, the trolls arms begin

reaching, clutching, and grasping for Drawg's throat.

Taken aback, Drawg only has time to swoosh, swoosh, and cut the arms off once again just before the fingers reach him.

Then again . . . and again the hideous sequence repeats itself. Drawg slices off the troll's arms, and the monster regains them and reaches for Drawg's neck.

You watch in horror from your cleft in the rock. Drawg is holding his own, but the big fighter must tire eventually.

You must now rely on Kyrel's magic.

Please turn to page 74.

The ape was taking something down the channel in those sacks. You want to know what it was. If you're lucky, it might lead you to the treasure. You start slowly down the old riverbed, following the scrape, scrape, scrape sound.

When the noise ceases, you know that the beast has reached its destination. Your stomach tightens, because you realize that that destination must also be yours. You gesture for your three companions to stay behind, and you creep forward to a doorway from which comes a flickering light. As you peer around the corner of the doorway, your breath catches in your throat.

You look into a huge stone cavern. In the center of the cavern, sitting by a small fire, is the ape, looking even more huge and ugly. A large, half-gnawed bone is in its monstrous grip.

But that is not what astounds and excites you. On the other side of the cavern is treasure—more treasure than you have ever dreamed of. A mound of gold nuggets taller than you are spreads out over the back part of the cavern. You can just barely make out a stack of neatly folded cloth bags near it. Then it dawns on you—the ape was dragging sacks of gold!

Your wide eyes turn to an enormous chest trimmed with gold and studded with emeralds and rubies. Chains secure it to the rock walls of the cave, and a huge, heavy padlock holds

it closed. If the chest itself is adorned with such riches, what even more incredible riches must it contain, you wonder.

This is a treasure beyond any you had expected to find. If only there were some way to take everything you see in the treasure room back with you, the land of Oon would be safe from the dragon for the rest of your lifetime.

You look back at Drawg, Kyrel, and Pantel and know that your young party of treasure hunters would not be equal to the task. Therefore, you must decide on the next-best course of action.

Returning to your companions, you tell each in turn to creep to the door and look. Each returns wide-eyed and excited.

"Drawg kill ape," the fighter says predictably.

"Then I'll open that chest," adds Pantel, eager to have an opportunity to show his skill. "It's got to be valuable—and something we can carry."

"M-Maybe we can manage a method of moving all that treasure, Loendal," chimes in Kyrel thoughtfully. Even he has managed to become caught up in the fascination of all that gold.

There is one more possibility to consider, you realize. It was late afternoon when you stepped inside the lair. That means the underground village is nearing its busiest time—the dinner hour. If you wait until dark, until

things quiet down, whatever you do will probably be safer.

1) If you decide to wait for dark, turn to page 27.

2) But if you want to fight the ape now, turn to page 114.

3) If you choose to explore the lair further in the hope of finding more treasure, turn to page 62.

You yawn again and look at the brash thief, the brawny fighter, and the hesitant magic-user. They have no qualms about going to sleep. Another yawn nudges at your throat, and suddenly, your fears seem groundless.

Rising, you pick up your bedroll and find a flat place to spread it.

Kyrel, Drawg, and Pantel quickly follow your lead. Soon you hear their snores, and finally you drift off to sleep.

In your dream, it is summer, and a warm breeze blows across your face. But it's not a pleasant feeling. Somehow, there is danger in it.

You wake and open your eyes. What you see makes you scream, but a hairy paw over your mouth stifles the sound. Frozen with fear, you stare into yellow eyes only inches from your own.

Even before the lips are drawn back to reveal long, pointed fangs, you know that the creature is a werewolf. And those fangs are headed for your throat!

Your last sight is of a jaunty velvet cap perched atop the werewolf's head.

THE END

Tunneling under the palisade seems like a good plan, less drastic than fire or fighting. And you have a feeling that Pantel might need to feel useful again after his close call with the nixie.

"You tunnel under the palisade," you tell the thief. "We'll follow."

You wait in the underbrush until the guard goes past once again. Then you pat Pantel on the shoulder, signaling him to run for the palisade.

He runs fast and low to the ground, barely visible over the clumps of bushes that lie between you and the log wall. When he reaches the wall, he throws himself onto his stomach and begins digging rapidly. The dirt flies up, and soon only Pantel's feet are visible. The rest of him disappears into the tunnel.

"Time to go," you whisper, tapping Kyrel on the shoulder. You want him to go next, before he has time to get any more frightened than he already is. Kyrel jumps when he feels your hand, but he runs toward the palisade.

When Kyrel is almost there, you tap Drawg, who grunts and moves at a slow lope toward the log fence.

You watch restlessly as Drawg seems to take forever to work his way into the tunnel. The guard could reappear any minute! He must not see you running toward the palisade!

Finally Drawg's feet disappear and you dash across the clearing toward the opening.

You slide on your belly the last few feet,

wriggling as fast as you can to get under the palisade.

The first thing you see as your head pops up out of the tunnel is a row of six pairs of boots. Your heart seems to stop . . . but then you recognize the feet of your companions.

"Why didn't you hide as soon as you got inside the wall?" you hiss impatiently. But your impatience is forgotten in the face of an even less pleasant feeling—fear! Your friends are standing in a row not from choice but from force. They face a row of uniformed guards with swords drawn.

And as you look at the guards' brownish-green faces framing their pink, piglike snouts and ears, you realize something even worse: You've come to the wrong place! The residents of this lair are not hobgoblins. What you are seeing—and, worse, what is seeing you—is a row of cruel and evil orcs.

The Golden Dragon must wait for its ransom. You and your companions will not be bringing it. . . .

THE END

You decide to explore further. You tell yourself it is so you can create the most detailed report possible for the Grand Oon, but you are really hoping to discover a way to take the treasure chest home to Oon.

Continuing on down the dry river channel, you round a corner, and the path becomes narrower and the ceiling lower. It finally narrows to an opening so small that even Pantel cannot squirm through.

You've passed no other openings, so you turn and retrace your steps to the top of the river channel.

"Drawg hungry!" the fighter complains.

"I must confess that I, too, could consume considerable cuisine," whispers Kyrel.

When your stomach echoes the refrain, you realize that outside the cave, you will not only be able to speak to your companions, but you will also be able to take off your pack and get out your long overdue rations.

You rise softly and gesture for your companions to follow you outside.

When your hunger is satisfied, you feel stronger and clearer of mind. Almost immediately a new plan occurs to you.

"Maybe we can't take the treasure chest, but we can each take a sack of gold nuggets. The dragon will then be appeased until we can return to Tesk with a larger party to take the rest of the treasure."

"A plausible plan," Kyrel says.

"Drawg take big sack," the fighter promises.

"Let's take home treasure, sure," agrees Pantel. "But your way, it ain't going to be much. Not if we have to outrun a bunch of monsters after our hides. My way, we can take lots more treasure."

"Why is that?" you ask.

Pantel's eyes gleam. "Because the hobgoblins are going to be too busy to see us leave or do anything about it if they do see us."

"Too busy with what?" you ask.

He shakes his head. "That's my business. You'll just have to trust me."

Trusting Pantel is the last thing you want to do. But if the thief says his plan will let you take more treasure—a subject on which he's an expert!—he's probably right.

"Pantel's plan seems less plausible but potentially more profitable," Kyrel says.

"Maybe more gold. Maybe more danger," Drawg says. For him, that's a long speech. It shows you how complicated the decision is.

1) Do you trust Pantel's self-interest enough to know that he wouldn't do anything really dangerous? If so, turn to page 68.

2) Or would you prefer to take what gold you can and return to Oon? Turn to page 33.

A trapdoor can mean many things. But you're sure that a safe can mean only one thing—something of great value is being protected. That's the place to start!

"Can you open the safe, Pantel?"

"I won't know until I try," he replies.

The thief examines the lock, which looks like an intricate wooden puzzle, with gears, wheels, and pegs. He moves first one piece, then another, then another. Finally, there is a slight grinding sound as the latch opens.

"Let's see that treasure!" you exclaim.

"Orc treasure?" Drawg asks.

"No. I think it must have been left by the people who built this building—and invented this lock. Imagine what their treasure will be like!"

Pantel reaches out and pulls on the handle of the safe.

A sudden high-pitched shriek deafens you. Your companions are all open-mouthed in shock, but the noise comes from none of them.

It's the safe itself! The same people who were clever enough to make the puzzle lock were also clever enough to make this alarm.

How many hundreds of years ago it was, you do not know. What it was meant to guard, you don't know, either. And you never will know! The thundering feet of dozens of orcs running to answer the alarm echo through the building. . . .

THE END

Kyrel's magical burning fingers worked well before, you remember. It should work again. You turn to the magic-user and say, "Burn the palisade."

Perhaps it is only your imagination, but it seems that your companion is less fearful and more confident as he steps out from under cover. He extends his fingers and closes his eyes. The flames shoot out—and burn the grass twenty feet in front of the palisade.

"Higher!" you hiss.

Distracted, Kyrel opens his eyes and the flames die away momentarily. Looking at the scorched ground, he understands his mistake, closes his eyes, and holds his outstretched arms a little higher.

This time the Burning Hands are aimed accurately. The logs of the palisade begin to smoulder and then burst into flames. You watch for a few minutes as the fire grows. Then Pantel rubs his hands together gleefully as the first occupants come running out and past the bushes where you hide. Drawg wraps his hand firmly around the hilt of his sword. You feel the tension of your companions as they prepare to run for the fortress under cover of smoke and confusion.

Then your eyes open wide as you see one unarmored figure moving closer to you than the others had.

"Wait!" you command. "Look!"

The creature you point at is brownish-green in color, with pointed pink ears and a piglike

pink snout. It's not a hobgoblin! It's an orc!

"Orcs!" Kyrel says, and it sounds like a gulp of fear.

Then you recall Polter's map. "This isn't the hobgoblin dwelling that was on the map. I thought when we first saw it that it didn't seem quite right. This orc village must not be on the map—but then, Polter warned me the map might not be a hundred percent accurate."

You remain motionless for a moment, relief and belated fear washing over you. Had you chosen one of the other plans, you and your companions might have been killed by these cruel and hateful monsters. It was a narrow escape.

"Let's go," you whisper.

And so the smoke that was to hide your approach to the palisade instead hides your retreat. But not even Drawg suggests that you should fight instead of retreat.

Please turn to page 96.

You look at the young thief, who looks back at you levelly. You remember the times on the journey when Pantel has been ready to charge off on dangerous adventures. You also remember how each time he stopped without argument at your command. Finally, you remember the advice of the Grand Oon: By using your companions' gifts, you stand a better chance for success on the journey than you would alone.

"Very well, Pantel," you say, "we will try your plan."

A grin spreads across the thief's face. He rubs his hands together in anticipation.

"There's just two things you gotta do," he says. "One, wait here till I get back. Two, don't lift a pinkie to help me, no matter how much you think I need it, till I give the word."

"Agreed," you say.

But this assurance does not seem to be enough for Pantel. "Even if you think I'm a goner for sure," he adds, "don't do anything I don't ask you to do."

"Agreed!" you repeat, irritated.

Drawg says, "Sure."

"I concur in the commitment," says Kyrel.

Pantel then slips off around the hill and disappears in the distance.

As soon as he is gone, you start to worry. Have you made a wise decision? Only time will tell.

It is after full sunrise when you see a figure approaching at a run. By its lithe shape, you

recognize Pantel. For a moment, you wonder why he is running. But your wonder ceases as you see the figures close behind him. There are six of them. All carry weapons.

Whatever Pantel's plan was, something must have gone horribly wrong with it.

As he draws even with the opening of the lair, Pantel leaves the path and heads straight toward you.

You motion Drawg and Kyrel to push farther into the bushes. Frantically you try to think how a magic-user, a fighter, and a cleric can fight off six angry pursuers.

Any chance you might have held out for succeeding vanishes when the pursuers are close enough for you to see their pink, piglike snouts. "Orcs!" you whisper. "Pantel's plan must have had to do with the orc village we passed yesterday. But what?"

"Why the wasteful wondering?" Kyrel asks. "The plan has fallen prey to an imperfection. If we do not p-perish, perhaps Pantel will tell us what the plan WAS!"

Next to you, Drawg draws his sword. "We fight," he says.

You reach for the slingshot at your side. Then you remember how firm Pantel was in extracting the promise not to give him any help unless he asked for it.

"Wait," you say.

Still running, Pantel hops over the final low bush that stands in his way and darts into the mouth of the lair.

Within seconds, Pantel's six pursuers have followed him through.

Your eyes widen. Now you see! Pantel's plan is going just as he wanted it to.

From inside the cave, you first hear shouts of surprise and alarm, then clanks and shrieks of battle. An orc suddenly comes running out. It fights as it flees, fending off two hobgoblins. The next orc to appear is fighting five hobgoblins. The remaining four orcs are now chased out of the cave by dozens of hobgoblins and carnivorous apes.

Cutting, slashing, and running, the fighters move out toward the path. When the noises of battle have faded, Pantel pokes his head out of the cave and wordlessly beckons you inside.

All is quiet. Still shapes on the ground tell you that the orcs had some success in the battle before they fled.

"See?" Pantel says proudly. "Now we can take all the gold we want. Nobody's going to stop us."

Hurrying to the unguarded treasure room, you each grab a rough sack off the pile and begin filling it with gold nuggets.

From time to time, you look longingly at the treasure chest. But that cannot be. Not on this trip.

You fill two sacks, all that you can carry. Looking around you, you see that Drawg has four sacks. Kyrel has only one. Pantel has two, a load the size of your own. It will be enough, you know, to appease the dragon for months to

come. But only if you can get it home to Oon.

"We must leave now," you say. You notice that each of your companions pauses and casts a final, sad glance at the treasure still remaining in the room.

You drag the sacks as you walk along the dry riverbed. It's easier than carrying them, and there is little danger of detection, for hobgoblins love a fight, and the orcs will give them one that could last for days.

Remembering the cleverness of Pantel's plan, you throw back your head and laugh. "What a sight you were, Pantel!" you exclaim. "I really thought you were a goner!"

"I knew you'd think that," the thief replies. "But I knew you'd keep your word if I got you to give it."

You are touched, and also slightly alarmed, as you remember how close you came to breaking your word. Drawg, too, looks sheepish.

It's bright daylight when you leave the lair. You pause for a moment for your eyes to adjust, and you realize how heavy the gold nuggets are.

"Must these burdens be borne all the way back to the land of our birth?" Kyrel asks pathetically.

"The Golden Dragon cannot use them here," you reply.

"But if we are returning with reinforcements to retrieve the remainder of the treasure, surely we could secrete these sacks in some safe spot. Indeed it would encourage the

Grand Oon to heed our urgings," Kyrel points out.

You understand his reasoning. If you do manage to get the treasure home, the Grand Oon might decide not to risk the expense and danger of sending another party for the rest of the treasure. But if you hide the sacks and return with just a few nuggets, surely he will send a party back for them—and for the chest as well.

"Drawg come for gold. Drawg go home with gold."

You understand the fighter's point, too. The dream of returning home with a great treasure has sustained all of you. You want to live out that dream, and that can only be done by carrying this heavy burden all the way back to the land of Oon.

You sigh. There have been so many decisions to make on this journey. You had hoped they were over. But this one remains.

1) If you hide the treasure to be picked up later, go to page 102.

2) But if you really want to try to get home with the treasure now, go to page 149.

"Your Burning Hands Spell," you quickly say to Kyrel. "Use it!"

Wide-eyed, Kyrel nods. Behind his fear, you think you see also a look of excitement.

Walking beside the magic-user, you advance toward the troll. You hope with all your might that Kyrel's magic will work.

Your hope is answered as five rays of flame shoot from Kyrel's fingertips and strike the troll on the chest.

The troll looks up toward you as the flames spread across its body. Drawg, still eager to fight, keeps his sword at the ready, but the sword is not needed. The flames surround the troll, turning it to ashes, which the wind picks up and blows away.

Within moments, the bridge is clear. "Looks like nothing happened here at all," Pantel says.

"It did, though," you say thoughtfully. You feel that something important happened to you, too. Your wisdom in making decisions was tested, and it proved to be all right.

For the rest of the morning, the way beyond the troll's bridge, though sometimes difficult, is not dangerous. Nevertheless, as midday approaches, you are pleased to discover a sparkling blue lake with an island in the center.

"We'll stop here for lunch," you tell your companions.

Your meager ration tastes wonderful, seasoned by the hunger you bring to it. The cool, pure water quenches your thirst. After you

eat, the four of you doze in the sun on the lakeshore.

"Beautiful day, isn't it?"

The voice rouses you from your slumber, and you scramble to your feet.

The speaker laughs and clasps his hands behind his back, to show that he means no harm. Certainly he looks friendly enough—a young man, well-muscled though not so strong as Drawg. His skin and hair are dark—almost greenish-looking, although that is probably because the sun is shining behind him. Water sparkles in the young man's hair and drips from the short pants that are his entire costume. He must have swum here from the far shore, you decide.

The swimmer flops down onto the grass, his arms folded under his chest. You and your companions settle back down.

"Beautiful day, isn't it?" the swimmer repeats. "Have you journeyed far?"

"Not far," you say, not wanting to tell this stranger more than he should know.

"Why, we have traveled clear from the land of Oon!" Kyrel protests. He has not found the walking easy, and he doesn't want the journey made to seem less than it was.

You shake your head, trying to signal your comrades to be quiet, but Pantel adds, "It ain't been so bad yet. But we got a long way to go to get the treasure from the hobgoblins' place in the land of Tesk."

You shake your head again, in dismay this

time. But the swimmer does no more than raise his eyebrows and make a "hm" noise. He starts to speak, closes his mouth, and then opens it again. "You know," he says, "if it's treasure you're after, legend has it that there's a wonderful treasure hidden in the lake."

"Yeah?" asks Pantel, his eyes lighting.

"Oh, yes—emeralds and rubies and diamonds and gold coins. Or so the legend has it. It's hidden in an underwater cave at the edge of that island in the middle of the lake."

Pantel stares at the island for only a moment before saying, "Let's give it a try."

"We know nothing about this treasure," you say. "We don't know where it came from, or to whom it belongs, or how to get to it."

"It belonged to a robber band," the swimmer says. "They hid it there many years ago, and then they never came back for it."

Suddenly alarmed at this conversation going much further, you realize that you have to know more about this stranger. Hoping no one will ask what you mean, you say the words of the Detect Evil Spell: "What evil can there be in it? I ask now."

Hoping they'll think you mean in looking for treasure, you look closely at the stranger. There is no green aura around his head—just the greenish color of his hair and skin. So the stranger's basic alignment is not evil. That knowledge relaxes you.

"Has no one tried to retrieve the treasure before this?" you finally ask.

"Yes," the swimmer says. "But the treasure is underwater. It requires great skill at diving to find it, and great lung-power to stay underwater long enough to open the chest it's in and bring it up. As far as I know, no one has succeeded."

"That shouldn't be so difficult," Pantel says, looking at you.

You shake your head. "I don't think it's wise to change our plan before even one day is out," you say. "Perhaps we can try for this treasure on the way back."

"I could get that treasure. I know I could!" Pantel says resentfully. "But you just don't want anybody else to be a hero. That's your problem, ain't it?"

"No," you say. "That ISN'T my problem." You hesitate, unable to explain, really, why searching for this treasure in the lake seems like a bad idea. You have a feeling that something is very wrong, but feelings are hard to put into words.

"Are you going to let me go or not?" Pantel asks.

When you don't respond immediately, he adds, "Well, even if you're not going to let me, you're not going to stop me!" He jumps to his feet and starts toward the lake.

The swimmer looks at you apologetically for the trouble he's caused, and then he follows Pantel.

You watch them go toward the lake. You know you can stop Pantel with a Command

Spell. He's too intelligent to be held by the spell for long, but it would last long enough for Drawg to subdue him by force.

"Drawg stop him?" asks the fighter.

When you hesitate, Kyrel points out, "If he finds treasure in the lake, we can be home by dark. Then we could go on to the hobgoblins' lair in Tesk and go home with twice as much treasure!"

Perhaps, then, you should let Pantel go. But the thought of it makes those uneasy feelings start up again.

You must decide—and you must decide soon, for Pantel and the swimmer are nearing the water's edge. Once they begin swimming, a Command Spell will be dangerous—it could even cause the thief to drown.

1) If you heed your uneasy feelings and stop Pantel with a magic spell, turn to page 83.

2) If you want to let Pantel dive for the treasure, turn to page 14.

The shouts of the angry hobgoblins break through your thoughts, and you know you can't leave the little Pech to their fate. You look around, hoping for an idea, but it is Pantel who is first with a possible solution. The thief takes a cloth from his pack and ties it around the eyes of the head Pech. Immediately, the small creature's stumbling stops.

You find your own handkerchief and blindfold another of the little creatures. Kyrel tears both of the long sleeves off his robe to serve as two more blindfolds.

With four of the Pech able to stand calmed, you are able to lead the other four into the dense bushes near the entrance, where the thick leaves shelter their eyes from the sun.

"Hobgoblins coming!" Drawg grunts.

"Quick, everyone, into the bushes!" you command. "Maybe they won't see us."

But when you turn back to the four blindfolded Pech, you discover that they have linked arms and stand firmly facing the entrance to their former home. Thinking that they have become confused in their blindness, you grab an arm and pull one toward the bushes. He shakes you loose.

"Come on!" you shout. "Get in the bushes!" You hear a strange noise and whirl around, expecting to see monsters storming from the lair. Instead you see a wall of rock growing over the entrance from the ground up!

As the wall covers the hole, two hobgoblins reach it and frantically try to scramble over

the top, but the wall is growing faster than they can climb it. The last you see of your enemy is the top of a helmet as it is knocked off by the growing wall. Finally, muffled shouts of fury are all you hear of your pursuers.

"Is it finished?" the Pech asks.

"It is finished," you say.

For a few moments, you sit in awed silence. But then, your curiosity aroused, you exclaim, "I thought you couldn't work another spell for twenty-four hours!"

"That was the Flesh to Stone spell," the Pech explains. "This is the WALL of Stone Spell. And now we must go. The hobgoblins have another way out of the tunnel."

With the blindfold over his eyes, the Pech leader cannot look at you, but he smiles in your direction. "This land of Oon . . ." he says to you slowly. "Are there caves there?"

"We will find you a cave," you promise.

"GOOD cave!" Drawg says.

"A positively palatial one," Kyrel adds.

"You don't have anything to worry about," Pantel concludes.

You think of the chest filled with precious treasure and of the bond you have formed with your three companions and the eight Pech.

"I couldn't have put it better myself," you say. "The Golden Dragon is waiting."

THE END

The two are almost to the water before your feeling of uneasiness about the lake becomes stronger than you can bear.

"Freeze!" you shout.

Pantel and the swimmer both halt in their tracks.

Quickly you turn to Drawg. "Go get Pantel," you order. "Don't hurt him, but hold him. Don't let him go into the water!"

Drawg lumbers off without questioning. By the time he reaches the two, the spell is already wearing off. Pantel is shaking off his confusion even as Drawg grabs him from behind.

The swimmer starts when he sees Pantel's feeble strugglings. He turns and looks back at you. Then, curiously, he begins to smile. Walking toward the water, he raises his hand in a salute, then dives into the lake.

In the last moment, you see the swimmer's webbed hand. Suddenly you know what caused your uneasy feelings. "He's a nixie!" you shout.

Kyrel gasps, and the struggles of Drawg and Pantel cease. All four of you turn to stare at the water, but not a trace of the swimmer remains. The nixie has returned to his underwater dwelling of living seaweed—the dwelling in which Pantel would have been imprisoned for one year if he had followed the swimmer into the water.

Pantel's struggling ceases, and Drawg releases his hold. Pantel looks at you and then

at the ground. Without another word, he walks over to the spot where the four of you had been dozing before the nixie's appearance. He shoulders his pack and heads off down the path.

It is as close to an apology as you will get from Pantel, you know. It is enough.

You shoulder your own pack and follow along after Pantel. Kyrel and Drawg do the same. None of you speaks—each, perhaps, is as lost in swirling feelings of relief and belated fear as you are.

You walk in peace for several hours, following a mental map through the hills. Then in the far distance you see a large fence made of big, pointed, wooden stakes. You close your eyes and picture the map Polter showed you. But something doesn't seem quite right in this view. The hills are right, but . . . well, you hadn't expected a palisade. Of course, Polter had said his map might not be one hundred percent accurate, but it's close.

"This must be it!" you say. "That'll be the hobgoblin lair ahead."

The day is almost over, so you make camp out of sight of the fenced lair. In the morning, you continue on your way, refreshed, the palisade ahead of you appearing and disappearing as you travel through the hills. It grows ever nearer, reminding you of your quest.

You finally top a final hill, and there before you is the palisade protecting the treasure you've come to find.

"Duck down!" you command sharply.

You and your companions hide in some dense underbrush and study the scene before you.

There are guard towers on each corner of the palisade, but they do not seem to be occupied. As you watch, you realize that a lone figure patrols, making one circuit around all four towers every half hour or so.

"Drawg fight guard," Drawg says. "No alarm then."

"My Burning Hands Spell would avert the need for fisticuffs," Kyrel says. "The foe would flee the flames and leave the . . . ah, boodle unguarded."

"Loendal, I could dig under those spiked logs when the guard ain't looking," Pantel offers. "I could find the loot and lead you guys right to it."

For once, each plan offered seems to have some advantages. But as always, it's up to you to choose. You look from the palisade to your companions and back again.

1) If you want to send Pantel to tunnel under the palisade, turn to page 59.

2) If you think Drawg should attack the guard, turn to page 90.

3) If you want Kyrel to burn the palisade with a magic spell, turn to page 65.

"The Grand Oon sent us on this journey to find a ransom for the Golden Dragon, not to make heroes of ourselves," you say. "We must go home with the treasure we have."

Your companions—even Kyrel—look disappointed.

"It is sad that our search must be so short," the magician says. "But certainly there is no real necessity to keep seeking." He sighs.

You are glad of Kyrel's support. You know that he, like you and Drawg and Pantel, will always wonder about the hobgoblin treasure.

Perhaps the next group of treasure seekers will find it.

Perhaps—dare you dream it?—you will be in that group, too. But for now, you must get safely home and let this be . . .

THE END

Recalling the strangers' heavy pickaxes and their numbers, you decide that you mustn't risk speaking to them. You had better go on into the tunnel and try to unravel its secrets without help from possibly dangerous strangers.

"Follow me," you whisper.

You begin the journey down the tunnel, which slopes steeply as you walk. You keep your ears tuned for the sound of more miners approaching.

From time to time, you pass shallow pockets carved out of the tunnel. They must have held rich deposits of whatever is mined.

"The cart tracks are getting fainter," you note as you walk.

"P-Perhaps we are approaching an area of more recent excavation," replies Kyrel.

Even so, the abrupt ending of the tunnel takes you by surprise. Puzzled, you stand for a moment. Then you see a glimmer of light just to the right of the tunnel's ending. It appears to be a new digging.

"Wait here," you direct. "I'll take a look."

You tiptoe forward and peer around the corner. In a small cave hollowed out of the rock sits a huge and very ugly ape. There's absolutely nothing friendly-looking about it as it chews on a bloody bone.

"Maybe that's Mog," you think. If so, Mog must be the miners' guard. Anything that unpleasant-looking couldn't be friendly!

Something pokes at your shoulder. You

jump, just barely stopping yourself from crying out. You turn and see Pantel.

"What's the story?" he whispers.

Furious at him for breaking the silence, you hold a finger to your lips. Unashamed, he turns away from you and looks at a bulging cloth sack that sits on the floor of the cave not three feet from the ape's back. Pantel begins to move forward toward the sack.

You are helpless. Even to give Pantel a command to stop would mean arousing the ape. You can only hope that he is stealthy enough to avoid detection.

He isn't. His soft-soled shoe twists on a pebble, making a scraping sound as he recovers. The ape hears it, turns, sees the young thief, and utters an angry squeal.

"Run!" you shout.

Drawg and Kyrel begin running back toward the entrance of the tunnel, but neither is a runner, and you have to slow your pace to keep between them and the ape. You expect the agile Pantel to overtake you. When he does not, you fear the worst.

The progress of Drawg and Kyrel becomes even slower as they continue up the steep incline. Soon you, too, are out of breath. You cannot run any farther.

Hot breath reaches the back of your neck, and a foul smell enters your nose. Choking, you know that you can run no more. . . .

THE END

"There's only one guard," you say thoughtfully. "It certainly ought to be easy enough to put it out of action."

You turn to Drawg. "You attack the guard. We'll wait here until you signal us to come."

Drawg grunts enthusiastically and hurries to the palisade as fast as his lumbering gait will take him. Slowly, but with great strength, he scales the pointed logs. Then he waits, crouching on the platform, for the sound of the guard's footsteps.

As the guard rounds the corner, Drawg takes it completely by surprise. In moments, the fight is over, and the guard lies still. Drawg stands over it triumphantly.

You're ready to sprint across the clearing to the palisade when Drawg holds up his hands, palms out, in a signal to halt. You stop, puzzled, and watch the fighter look around furtively, climb down the palisade, and run back toward you!

He arrives breathless but frantic to speak. You hope you've misheard him through the gasping, for what he says sounds like "orcs!"

"Orcs?" you repeat in horror.

And then you remember thinking that the location seemed strange in comparison to the map you had studied. Could you have reached not the hobgoblin village but the lair of those most hateful of all monsters—orcs?

Drawg's emphatic repetition of the word tells you that you have indeed come to the wrong village.

"Let's go in anyway, Loeondal. Orcs have treasure, too, don't they?" says Pantel, predictably.

"Fight orcs!" Drawg growls.

You turn to him in surprise. You had thought that discovering that the guard was an orc had frightened the fighter. Now you know it excited him. He WANTS to fight them.

"Orcs are particularly more d-difficult to pacify than hobgoblins," points out a wide-eyed Kyrel.

You know that means he would rather not fight. But to avoid every situation that makes Kyrel afraid, you would have to stay home!

Your pulse, already racing, quickens still more. To invade the orc lair or to resume your journey and look for the hobgoblin dwelling. Both choices have risks, and both offer rewards. Which will it be?

1) If you choose to invade the orc village, turn to page 109.

2) Otherwise, leave the orc village, go back to the path, and walk until you find signs of the hobgoblin dwelling. Turn to page 122.

You look at the eight strange-looking little people, the last of a proud kingdom, and know that you cannot bring yourself to leave them behind. If you can get them home to the Grand Oon, he will know how to help them. Perhaps he will even be able to find others of their kind.

You close your eyes and concentrate, hoping you have enough magic power to affect all the Pech. You hope, too, that nothing breaks the silence until your Remove Fear Spell has had a chance to work.

Finally, you open your eyes. The Pech leader, an odd look crossing his face, says, "We will go with you."

He slams the lid closed on the treasure chest, turns the key in the lock, and hangs the key back around his neck. With two blows of his large pickax, he breaks the chains that hold the treasure chest to the stone walls of the cave. He speaks, and four of his fellow creatures hoist the chest to their shoulders.

You watch, open-mouthed. Your spell has worked too well. Surely the tiny Pech cannot think it is possible to escape, carrying a massive treasure chest, from an underground lair filled with angry hobgoblins.

"You must leave the treasure behind," you say.

The leader of the Pech folds his arms across his chest and stares at you with his wide, pupilless eyes. "If we cannot take the chest, we will not go," he says.

You know that it might put all of you in danger. You sigh, knowing you must live with whatever happens.

"Very well, let's go. Pantel, scout the way."

The thief darts from rock to rock up the channel, sometimes slithering along the floor. He signals you from one safe waiting place to the next. The Pech, all uncertainty gone, move boldly but quietly at Kyrel's whispered command. Those carrying the chest seem tireless.

Just as you reach the entrance to lair, deafening noises erupt in the mine tunnel. Stomping boots and loud shouts echo through the stone passages.

"The hobgoblins are looking for us!" the Pech whispers. "Soon they will realize that we are gone."

Hurriedly peering out the entrance, you discover that the guard has not been replaced.

"We're in luck! Let's get out of here before those hobgoblins think to check up here!"

You step out of the lair into midafternoon sunshine. Just as you seem on the verge of escaping to safety, everything begins to go wrong at once. The Pech stumble into one another, all their previous boldness and surefootedness gone. When one of them tries to cover his eyes, the treasure chest tips and starts to fall. Drawg catches it and keeps it from falling, but from the look of his bowed knees and straining back, he can't hold it for long.

From just inside the cave entrance, you hear the sound of hobgoblins running and shouting. Soon they will think to look outside, and that will be the end for your party.

Your heart sinking, you quickly survey the scene of confusion around you. To save the Pech, you must have Drawg fight the hobgoblins. But if Drawg fights the hobgoblins, the Pech treasure will be in danger.

The Pech, their arms over their heads to hide from the sun, seem to read your thoughts. The leader says to Kyrel, "Take the treasure. We are doomed, but through our carvings we will be remembered. Please—save the treasure!"

"I translate truthfully, but the task is distasteful," Kyrel says. There is no doubt from the look on his face that he does not want you to obey.

"You heard the little guy," Pantel says. "Save the treasure! The Golden Dragon is waiting!"

The Pech or their treasure—you must decide.

1) If you want to arrive home triumphantly bearing treasure but without the unfortunate Pech, turn to page 137.

2) If you choose to try to save the Pech, knowing you have no time to save the treasure, turn to page 79.

Evening finds you making camp in a pleasantly wooded spot not far off your path. You prepare a meal and then sit by the glowing coals of the fire, talking quietly.

"Hail, travelers!" You jump as the hearty call breaks the stillness. Into the light of the campfire walks a stranger, dressed all in black, from his soft leather shoes to his jaunty velvet cap. A sparkling jewel hangs on a chain around his neck.

"Hello," you say, now cautious about strangers.

"Might I sit and rest with you for a moment or two?" the stranger asks in polite and cultured tones. "I ask nothing of you but your company—I have food and drink of my own."

After you have reluctantly given your permission, the stranger proceeds to keep his word. From an elegant traveling case he produces mouth-watering delicacies—tender-looking meats, crisp-crusted bread with real butter, and frosted nutcakes for dessert.

"Would you like some?" the stranger asks. "I have plenty."

"No, thank you," you say, still uneasy and wanting to serve as an example to the others.

"I p-prefer not to partake," Kyrel says.

"Drawg not hungry," says the fighter, to your surprise.

But the thief doesn't surprise you. "You bet," he says, taking two. He eats one on the spot and puts the other carefully in his pack for later.

Having finished eating, the stranger puts the extra food back into his case and lingers for a moment, apparently enjoying the fire and the company. He asks a few seemingly harmless questions about who you are and where you have come from. Wiser already than when your journey started, your companions do not give him detailed replies.

Finally, the stranger stands up. "I bid you all farewell, gentlemen," he says. He starts down the road in the direction from which you have come.

You do not feel at ease even after the stranger's departure. "I wish I had thought to use my Detect Evil Spell on him," you say.

"You should have used a 'Get Lost' spell so we could have turned in," Pantel says, yawning. Kyrel and Drawg, too, seem ready for sleep and are uninterested in your vague fears.

"Stop being foolish!" you tell yourself. "Not everyone who happens to come along can be a danger! Go to sleep!"

But the uneasiness you feel tempts you to order your companions to wake up and hunt for a different spot to rest.

Looking at your companions' drooping eyes, you know you would meet real resistance to that command. Perhaps the best thing to do is to let them sleep while you keep watch. And yet, as you stifle a yawn, you wonder if you could stay awake yourself.

Pantel stretches and makes no attempt to

hide his yawn. Your comrades will soon be asleep. What will you do?

1) If you give in to your yawns and go to sleep, turn to page 58.

2) If you think it would be better to move on right now and make camp somewhere else, turn to page 15.

3) If you wish to let your companions sleep while you try to keep watch, turn to page 46.

"Head for the tunnel to the right!" you tell your companions. Somehow, knowing that the ugly ape is no longer down there makes that direction seem more attractive than the channel.

You walk into the tunnel and instantly turn your ankle in a roughness in the floor. Looking down, you see two ruts worn into the stone. Heavy carts have come along here, time after time after time.

"It's a mine!" you whisper. Your pulse quickens. A mine means treasure, and treasure is what you are seeking.

Down and down into the tunnel you go. You have no idea how far you have gone. Only the increasing chill in the air signals that you are deep, deep in the earth.

Suddenly you hear a peculiar noise—a squeak and a scrape combined. It is an unpleasant noise, and it is growing louder.

"Hide behind the rocks," you whisper. "Something's coming!"

From behind a large rock, you peer out and see a cart approaching, a cart filled with rough cloth sacks. Pushing the cart are some of the strangest creatures you have ever seen.

They are small and thin, with long arms and legs, broad feet and hands, and pale, yellowish skin. Red hair frames their round faces, which have huge, bulging eyes with no pupils at the centers.

These must be the miners. But what are they mining?

The easiest way to find out would be to ask them.

"I don't understand their language. Do you, Kyrel?"

"Yes!" he says, excited at being asked to contribute to the quest. "I can interpret."

You pause for a moment to use your Detect Evil Spell. No bad aura surrounds the little men. "They appear not to be evil," you whisper.

"Then why are they here in the evil hobgoblins' lair?" asks Pantel.

"M-Maybe they are prisoners," suggests Kyrel.

Although these creatures look harmless, each of them is armed with a long, heavy pickax. So perhaps it would be better to remain in hiding and let the creatures pass.

You must decide soon. If you are going to reveal yourselves, it will be best to do it while the creatures are still some distance away. Otherwise, they might think you are attacking them.

1) If you want to stay in hiding and let the miners pass, turn to page 130.

2) If you think it would be safe to speak to the miners, turn to page 124.

"I'm afraid that if we carry all this gold we'll end up leaving bits of it here and there along the trail," you say thoughtfully. "The best guarantee for getting all of it home is to hide most of it now."

Following your example, the others kneel and begin to dig in the soft earth.

"Ouch!" says Kyrel. "Some substance is scratching my skin."

"Mine, too!" Pantel says. "There must be some kind of weird grass here."

You, too, are feeling the soft prickles and scratches on your hands and wrists. But finally the gold is hidden.

Trying once again to lead by example, you pat the ground a final time, stand, turn your back on the buried treasure, and walk briskly away. You go the way you came, around the hill to avoid detection from the tunnel in case the hobgoblins have returned. Trusting your companions to keep up with you, you don't look back.

You are out of sight of the hobgoblins' lair when you begin to grow tired—more tired than you ought to be, in spite of your hard digging and brisk walking.

"Drawg . . . tired," the fighter says behind you. You turn to look and see that the fighter is stumbling as he walks.

"There is a definite lassitude in my legs," Kyrel says just as he falls to the ground.

"I ain't down yet," Pantel says. But from the sound of his voice, you know he soon will be.

You sink to your knees. Your brain, increasingly foggy, struggles to understand what is happening to you. Suddenly you are jarred by a memory of a tale told to you long ago by Polter:

"There are sprites who hide in the grass. They hurl darts poisoned with a sleeping potion. So fine-pointed are the darts that you think you are merely being cut by sharp grass," you recall Polter saying.

"But unlike those harmless stings of grass, sprite's darts will cause you to lose consciousness.

"Oh, it's not fatal," he replies to your question. "It's not even dangerous, if you have no secrets. For you will wake refreshed, but with no memory of what happened before you were put to sleep."

"Secrets?" you think as the world grows dark around you. "Yes, there was a secret—wasn't there? A sack, a heavy sack, filled with—what? Buried somewhere—buried . . . but where?"

THE END

You close the lid of the chest in a vague hope that the treasure will still be there if another hunter returns for it at some future time.

"Are you crazy?" Pantel demands. "We were sent to find treasure. If this ain't treasure, I'm an orc!"

"We were sent to bring treasure home," you correct him. "If we can't get it home, what good is it? And how can we get home when it means escaping from a walled village filled with orcs?"

"And I suppose you think the hobgoblins are going to just hand their treasure over on a platter, huh?" Pantel demands. "At least we made it to this treasure. I say we find some way to get it out of here."

"You have a point," you say.

But then you add to yourself, "Thieves NEVER see danger!" The decision that seems so simple to Pantel is difficult for you.

1) If you leave the treasure, sneak out of the orc village, and go on to the hobgoblin lair, turn to page 96.

2) If you're determined to find a way to escape with the orc treasure, turn to page 153.

Risky as it is, you decide that you must try to do both—save the Pech AND take treasure for the Golden Dragon of Oon.

When the Pech come back from emptying their cart, you say to them through Kyrel, "Hide us in the cart under the empty bags and take us down into the mine."

The Pech look at you and then at one another. There is a fast, rough babble of conversation.

"You really do not want to save any of us," Kyrel translates. "You only said you would help us so that you could have our gold."

You must be honest. "We do want your gold," you tell them. Kyrel hesitates and you gesture impatiently for him to translate what you are saying.

"We have been sent by the ruler of our kingdom," you continue, "to find a ransom for the Golden Dragon that guards our land. Without the ransom, our people will be in danger of the same fate that has befallen you. We want our people to remain free. That is why the gold is important. It is because we understand how important freedom is that you can be sure we will save you."

By the time Kyrel finishes translating your little speech, the Pech look more comfortable. One of them reaches into the cart and pulls out the stack of empty sacks. He points into the bottom of the cart and makes an odd clicking sound.

"Get in," Kyrel translates.

"Get in," you repeat to Drawg and Pantel. You yourself climb in after them, and Kyrel stays with the Pech.

"Tell them we're ready," you whisper.

You duck down as the cart starts down the tunnel with a harsh squeaking noise.

The rough sacks that surround you scratch your skin. They are very dusty, and the dust tickles your nose and dries your throat. You think longingly of the waterbag and handkerchief in the pack on your back. Then you try to ignore the thought—it's only torture.

The Pech push the cart back to the mine and resume their work. Hidden in the cart, you hear the clanging of their picks against the rocks.

The Pech are supposed to tell you when it is safe to come out. Since they haven't, you assume that the ape is still on guard.

Suddenly, to your horror, the itching in your nose becomes uncontrollable. You cannot hold back—you are going to sneeze!

"AAA-CHOO!"

There is a rush of cold air on your neck. You look up to see why . . . and find yourself looking straight into the eyes of a carnivorous ape. A huge, hairy paw reaches down and grabs you by the throat. The creature lifts you up and holds you over its head, staring at you with a mixture of fury and curiosity. Your feet dangle off the floor. The blood pounds in your head.

"Drawg," you croak, "attack!"

You hear a rustle in the cart and then a rush of the Pech language.

"They want our warrior to wait," Kyrel tells you, his voice quaking with fear. "They say they must make magic."

Everything starts to go black. You must hurry and give an order—one that will either save your life or end it. Drawing what little breath you can, you shout:

1) "Use magic." Turn to page 140.

2) "Drawg, attack!" Turn to page 156.

You know that wisdom often calls for caution. But you know that cowardice can sometimes call forth caution, too.

"We will explore the village," you tell your comrades.

"I cannot conceive of succeeding in climbing the palisade," Kyrel says.

You look at his boney arms under his flowing magician's robe and silently agree.

"Well, we'll try something else."

You take off your pack and untie the rope that binds your bedroll. Drawg and Pantel quickly offer their ropes, too. The ties don't look as if they will hold, and you're glad the frail magician won't put much strain on them.

"There," you say, and hand the knotted length of rope to Pantel. "If you can't climb, Kyrel, we'll pull you up."

That news only makes Kyrel look glummer.

"All right, let's go. You first, Drawg."

When Drawg is safely on the walkway, he signals for Pantel. The young thief crosses the clearing in no time. Then it's your turn.

"Let's go, Kyrel. Try to keep up!"

"I will exert every effort," Kyrel says.

The two of you begin to run across the clearing. You have to run slower in order not to leave Kyrel behind, and each step you're sure that you'll be seen.

But you reach the palisade safely. Pantel immediately tosses down the rope. Kyrel, his knees quivering, bravely hangs on. Pantel and Drawg begin to pull, hand over hand,

until they can pull Kyrel safely up over the top.

You quickly pull yourself up on the rope and join them on the wooden walkway. The coast is still clear.

But what now?

You look down into the orc village. As you would expect of orcs, the village consists mainly of ugly mud huts. There are no flowers or trees, no dogs or cats, nothing to make the village cheerful or comfortable.

But to your surprise, you see one thing thing of beauty in the midst of the ugliness. A large building made of great stone blocks with tall, carved marble columns out front shows that the orcs must have built their village on a site that once belonged to more civilized creatures.

The treasure must be there!

Your eyes scan the village. It is not bustling, exactly, but there are orcs coming and going from time to time. You will have to dart among the mud huts, hoping that no one sees you.

"Pantel, you're a thief, trained to sneak around crowded places. You go first. We'll watch from here and follow the path you take."

"No problem," says the thief. He quickly descends the wooden staircase and instantly disappears. He is so clever at moving unseen that at times even you can't be sure just where he is. Every tiny bit of shade conceals him. Every cart or pile of wood gives him something to hide under.

"You next, Drawg," you say. Although the fighter goes the same way, his size and clumsiness make him easy to spot. When he finally reaches the stone building and goes through the door Pantel opens for him, you are amazed that he has not been seen.

"We're next," you say to Kyrel. You feel the magic-user trembling beside you.

"My f-feet will not f-function. F-Fear has f-frozen them."

"Move!" you command, trying to be fierce.

The timid magic-user begins the downward climb, testing each step before he moves on to it. But miraculously, no one in the village looks up. At the bottom, you grab his arm and pull him quickly through the village.

The inside of the stone building takes you completely by surprise. Beautiful carved woodwork decorates a huge stone room. Graceful, arching windows let light into three sides, but they have clearly not held glass for a long time. Rocks by the windows tell you that the glass was probably the target of orcs at play.

Pantel does not let you study the room for long. He hops up and down, from one foot to the other, tugging at your arm. "You gotta see what I found!"

"You've only been here a few minutes! How could you have found anything so quickly?"

"Well, I'm not a thief for nothing."

"All right. Lead the way."

Pantel, for once happy to do as he's told,

leads you through the large, open main room into a smaller room at the back.

"Look!" he says proudly. He walks over to one of the richly paneled walls. He gives the panelng a hard, sudden poke with two fingers, and a section of the wall pops out, revealing a small metal door. A safe!

"And that ain't all!" The thief drops to one knee and points at the floor. You join him and see a barely visible square outlined in the boards of the floor.

"Trapdoor," Pantel says shortly. Taking a knife from his belt, he pries the door open. A damp smell rises from the hole. Only the top rung of a wooden ladder is visible.

You sit back on your heels, stunned. The thief has found so much, so quickly! But, of course, that is his gift. Yours is supposed to be the ability to make wise decisions.

Knowing that there may not be time both to explore the safe and to go through the trapdoor, which is most likely to lead to the treasure you seek?

1) If you decide to open the safe, turn to page 64.

2) If you want to explore the mysteries below the trapdoor, turn to page 132.

3) If you think it would be safer to send the fighter through the trapdoor first, turn to page 37.

In the end, it is the treasure chest that beckons you. You must, if possible, see what is inside.

Before you can do that, the ape must be overcome.

You look at Drawg. You yourself are tired after your long walk. Drawg, with his larger bulk and heavy armor, must be even more so. But he must now battle the ape. Maybe you can do something to improve his odds.

You take Kyrel aside and whisper in his ear. Kyrel nods in understanding. Then you signal Drawg to draw his sword and be ready to fight.

Kyrel steps forward and holds out his hands. He points them toward the flickering fire in front of the dozing ape. Kyrel closes his eyes and concentrates. Suddenly flame shoots from his fingers and into the fire, which blazes up with blinding intensity.

The ape jumps to its feet with a squeal. It backs away, stumbling over the log on which it has been sitting. While it is still off-balance, you signal to Drawg.

The fighter dashes forward and dispatches the confused ape with a few quick thrusts of his sword.

All four of you fall upon the treasure chest. Pantel runs his hand across it in awe. You thump it to determine its sturdiness—it is very sturdy indeed.

Drawg inserts his dagger into one of the links in the chain that anchors the chest to the stone wall of the cave. He twists until the

veins stand out on his forehead from the effort. The link does not budge.

"Too hard," the husky fighter says, disappointed.

Pantel concentrates on the lock. He takes an assortment of thin and oddly twisted pieces of metal out of his pack. After twisting each of them delicately in the lock, he, too, shakes his head.

"Not a chance," he says grumpily.

"What about you, Kyrel? Will your magic open it?" you ask.

"No. It would just burn it," the magic-user replies.

The treasure chest cannot be broken loose, and it cannot be opened—not by the four of you.

"You might as well stop trying," you say. "It's useless."

"But what should we do?" you ask yourself.

1) To take this treasure chest, you will need help. If you want to return home and ask the Grand Oon for help, turn to page 26.

2) Or would you rather explore further and hope you find an answer somewhere in the hobgoblin lair? If so, turn to page 62.

"Well . . . " The others look at you eagerly, waiting for you to speak. "Let's try to take it."

"Yahoo!" shouts Pantel, his voice echoing in the small room.

You close the lid of the chest and turn to Drawg. "How heavy is it?" you ask.

Drawg advances, squats down, and puts one great fist around each of the chest's handles. He tries to stand but cannot. "Heavy," he says, shaking his big head.

"Okay." You try not to show your disappointment. "We'll just take as much as we can carry," you say. You open the lid of the casket again and begin to fill your pockets with the treasure.

The others dart forward and join you. Soon the four of you are loaded down, lumpy and jingling. The sight of a bulging coat covering Kyrel's thin body is particularly funny . . . until you remember that the noise and the weight of the treasure could be dangerous.

Subdued, you lead the others back down the tunnel. With difficulty, you pull yourself back up the wooden ladder. Kyrel almost doesn't make it. He has to be pushed from behind by Drawg. Only Pantel is still able to move with some speed and grace.

Your journey through the orc village is one of long moments of standing in motionless terror punctuated by lumbering dashes between almost nonexistent hiding places.

Why you make it to the palisade without being seen, you don't understand. But by the

time you climb to the walkway, Pantel has already clambered over, climbed down, and begun his run for cover.

You take the rope from around your waist, tie it around one of the logs, and lower yourself down. Drawg picks Kyrel up and lowers him over the side. The magic-user's hands clasp the rope, and for a moment you think he will just hang there forever. Then he remembers what he has to do. He begins to lower himself.

But Kyrel's weakness and the extra weight in his pockets are too much for him. The rope slips through his hands, and he lands on the ground, sprawled on his back. He frantically shakes his hands, hoping to ease the pain of the rope burns.

Drawg does not fare any better. Just as he begins to climb down, his great weight breaks the slender rope. He plummets to the ground, landing next to Kyrel with a great puff as the air is forced out of his lungs. "Ugh," he says, sitting up.

"We have to go," you tell them. You wish that you could be more caring about these little injuries. But you are more concerned about the big ones the orcs can inflict if they find you.

"We go," Drawg agrees, dragging himself slowly to his feet.

"Heading home is not a hardship," Kyrel agrees, looking down at his bleeding hands.

Dangerous though it is, you pause for a

moment to grab Kyrel's wrist and work your Cure Light Wounds Spell on his hands. You need to have his mind on escape, not his painful hands.

For once you take a chance on all of you moving at the same time, and the three of you cross the clearing together.

Safely back in hiding, you relax against your bedrolls.

"Oh!" you say in sudden realization. "We don't have any rope to tie the bedrolls . . . Oh, well, that's all right. We won't need them, anyway, now that we're going home with the treasure."

"You mean we're not going to try for the hobgoblin loot, too?" Pantel asks in disbelief.

"Go home now?" Drawg's heavy, flat face is twisted in amazement.

You look at them, surprised. You had just assumed that your journey was over once a treasure was found. But Drawg and Pantel are right. You could go on from here, get the hobgoblin treasure, and return to Oon with twice as much as you were expected to bring back.

"I cannot continue to carry the current contents of my pockets," Kyrel says.

You look at his sagging robe. "No, you can't," you agree. "None of us can. It would be dangerous to be so weighted down. If we DO go on, we'll have to hide the treasure."

"It would be wonderful to be welcomed home

as wealthy treasure seekers," the magic-user says wistfully.

Astonished at discovering a would-be hero in the quiet, frightened magic-user, you just agree. "Yes, it would."

1) If you want to hide the treasure and go searching for the hobgoblin lair, turn to page 138.

2) If you would rather go home now with the treasure you have, turn to page 86.

Were it not for the quick and clever eyes of Pantel, your little party might have passed the hobgoblins' lair without ever knowing it was there.

You are passing through hills that seem familiar from your study of Polter's map, when suddenly Pantel's talents as a thief really pay off.

"Look, Loendal. There in the hill."

At first it looks just like any hill, but then you finally perceive a small opening in the side of a hill that rises well back from the path. Low bushes grow on either side of the opening, almost completely hiding the entrance.

Pantel nudges you and directs your attention with a motion of his head. You see the opening, but you also see the glint of metal just inside it.

"That might be the helmet of a hobgoblin guard," you say softly.

You signal the others to remain quiet and continue on down the path. You note with pleasure that this time your leadership goes unquestioned.

When you are sure you are well past the guard's field of vision, you lead your party off the path. A long, looping circle takes you around the hobgoblins' hill. Finally, a long and tiring time later, you reach the other side of the opening in the hill.

The bushes concealing the opening now conceal you and your three companions. You wait

quietly for a few moments, resting your weary legs but alert to everything you can find out about the lair.

"There's a guard just inside the entrance to the cave," you whisper. You know that from the occasional grunts and the creak of leather armor as the guard shifts its position. "There's probably only one, though, because there hasn't been any talking."

One guard. A difficulty but not an impossibility.

"Drawg take him!" offers the fighter enthusiastically.

"Thank you, Drawg," you reply, smiling. "I'm considering it."

You could also use magic on the guard, putting him into a sleep from which he won't waken until your party is well past.

The resting position that your tired muscles first welcomed is quickly becoming a torture as those muscles stiffen. If you are going to be able to move at all, you must move soon.

1) If you decide to use your magic on the guard, turn to page 17.

2) If you prefer to order Drawg to attack, turn to page 49.

The strange little creatures don't carry their pickaxes as if they were used to using them as weapons, you realize. And they seem to have a gentleness and sadness about them that keeps you from believing that they might be harmful.

"Kyrel, I want you to speak to the miners."

Kyrel looks at you in horror. "Speak?" he echoes. "What shall I say?"

"Try 'hello,' for starters. Hurry. You must reach them before they leave the tunnel."

"Where will you be?" Kyrel asks, his eyes wide with fear.

"I'll be right beside you," you assure him. "So will Pantel and Drawg."

Hearing their names, the other two treasure seekers emerge from hiding. "We're all behind you," you tell Kyrel. "Now, let's go."

With that assurance, he hurries after the miners, whose squeaking cart is now just a dim sound far ahead up the tunnel.

Kyrel, standing as far back as he dares, takes a deep breath and calls out a greeting with a hollow, echoing sound. The little men whirl to face him with their picks at the ready. But the thin and timid magic-user is so obviously harmless that they soon relax.

Kyrel speaks, and the miners answer in the strange, hollow-sounding language. It is a long conversation, and you do not understand any of the words. To your surprise, you see two tears well up in the magic-user's eyes and roll down his cheeks.

"Oh, this situation is so sad!" he says. "We have to help—have to, have to!"

"Help with what?" you ask. "What's so sad?"

"The beasts beat them. Their captors are cruel to them. Their treasure was taken. And—"

"Stop!" you command. Kyrel freezes in mid-sentence. "Now, begin at the beginning. Remember, none of us has understood a word of the talk. It's up to you to tell us."

Kyrel pulls at his hair, as if trying to pull forth his jumbled thoughts. Then he begins to speak:

"These people are called the Pech," he says. "This hobgoblin lair is their home. They made the mines. Originally, they were just mining for stone. But then hobgoblins heard about gold being here, and they conquered the kingdom. Now they make the Pech mine for gold.

"Oh," Kyrel concludes, two more tears welling up in his eyes, "it is so sad!"

"Ohhhh!" moans Drawg in tones of deep sorrow.

"Why don't they just light out?" Pantel asks.

Kyrel looks bewildered, so the thief adds, "Hightail it. Run away."

Kyrel's bewilderment changes to surprise. "I know not," he says.

"Well, ask 'em," Pantel says.

Pantel and the little men launch into more click and gurgle of the Pech tongue, and Kyrel

soon turns back to you. "The Pech remain in the dark because they cannot bear the bright light. Sunshine would sap their sight, and their safety would suffer."

It is sad indeed, you think. You wish there was something you could do to help.

As if reading your thoughts, Kyrel says, "I already announced that we would aid them."

"How?"

"Well," Kyrel tells you, "we can vanquish the vile villains who have overrun the village. Or we can flee with our new friends and find them a freehold."

Wishing that the magic-user had never learned the alphabet, you recognize that this is brave talk coming from the once-cowardly magician.

And he is right—you can help. But it will take you some time to decide how. The echoes of the Pech tongue sound again in the cave.

"The Pech must push on," Kyrel translates. "An ape awaits them at the apex of the tunnel. Another awaits their arrival at the mine.

"They are very unpleasant," he adds, forgetting to use *A* words in his feelings for the little people.

"Tell them to go," you say. "By the time they have come back, we will have a plan."

And so the squeak-squeak-squeak of the cart resumes, as you sink to the floor of the tunnel to think.

"Oh, let's remove them right away!" pleads the soft-hearted Kyrel.

"And leave the treasure? That's what we came for!" says an appalled Pantel.

You ponder the problem for a while and then say, "Maybe if we talk to the Pech some more, we can find a way both to save them and get some treasure."

"Or nothing," says Drawg unexpectedly. You frown at the fighter.

You hear the squeak of the cart begin again in the distance, softer this time because it is lighter without its burden of heavily laden sacks. You must make a decision!

1) If you choose to help the Pech escape immediately, turn to page 150.

2) If you would rather look for a way to save both the Pech and their treasure, turn to page 105.

Just as you know you must reach a decision, Kyrel says, "In t-truth, the trauma is not tremendous."

If Drawg said it, or even Pantel, there might be reason for doubt. But Kyrel would not lie just to appear brave.

"We'll go on our way," you say.

You all gather up your bedrolls and packs and start off down the path. Within two days, the episode is nearly forgotten.

You are not reminded of it until the middle of the third night, when something awakens you out of a sound sleep.

Opening your eyes, you see yellow eyes within inches of yours. They gleam out of a face so covered by hair that it is hard to recognize Kyrel's features behind it.

Suddenly you know—that was no wild animal scratch on Kyrel's throat. It was the toothmark of a werewolf! You remember the elegant stranger who shared your campfire. That must have been the werewolf in its human form.

Your healing powers do not work against such an evil wound. Had you taken Kyrel home, Polter could have saved him with a magic spell. Now it is too late. You can only hope that YOU will be able to get back to Polter within three days after . . . after . . .

Your eyes are drawn to the long fangs approaching your throat. . . .

THE END

"Better safe than sorry," says Pantel.

"You're right," you say, surprised to find yourself in agreement with the thief.

You and the others wait motionlessly behind the rocks as the strange-looking miners go past.

The miners speak to one another as they walk. Their language consists of strange, hollow clicks and harsh "guh" sounds. The conversation sounds kind of sad and thoughtful.

You wish you could understand what the miners say, but Kyrel is listening intently. Finally, with a last rattle and a squeak of their cart, the miners are past.

As the creak-squeak grows fainter in the distance, you edge forward and whisper to Kyrel, "What did they say?"

"They were musing about someone whose moniker is Mog," he tells you. "Said one, 'Mog was very stern today.' Said the second, 'Stern? I call it cruel.' The third said, 'To us, it is cruelty; to Mog, it is sport.' Then the dialogue diminished," Kyrel concludes.

You frown, wondering what to make of this conversation. Who is Mog? One of these strange creatures? Or a hobgoblin, perhaps? And is the cruelty directed at them or used at their command!

If Mog is one of these creatures, it is better, certainly, not to speak to them. But if these creatures are Mog's victims, perhaps it is only right to find out if they need your help.

"Did the creatures sound frightened?"

Kyrel thinks for a moment. "N-No," he says.

"Well, then, did they sound as though they admire Mog's cruelty?"

Kyrel wrinkles his nose in thought. "I know not," he says.

So much for Kyrel's help. But then you chide yourself for thinking that. After all, he was able to tell you what the creatures said, even if he can't tell you how they said it.

You feel your resolve weakening. Perhaps it would be best, after all, to speak to them. They appear to be your best chance to learn the secret of the mine.

1) If you want to go on and explore the tunnel on your own, turn to page 87.

2) If you decide to speak to the miners, turn to page 124.

There might be treasure below, or there might be danger. You're the leader of this party, and it is up to you to take the risk.

"I'm going down," you tell Kyrel, Drawg, and Pantel. "The rest of you wait here until I call you."

You lower yourself down into the coolness. At the bottom of the ladder you pause for your eyes to adjust to the dim light.

You walk slowly down a tunnel, running your hand along the dirt wall. You do not feel any openings—on that side, anyway.

Far ahead, you see a glimmer of light. It could be daylight seen through a tunnel opening, it might be a torch on a wall, or, you have to admit, in the hand of a waiting orc.

Moving more cautiously, you finally see that the light is coming out of an opening on the right-hand side of the tunnel. You creep quietly to the opening and very cautiously peer into it.

You do indeed see a torch stuck into a niche in the wall. But beyond it is a sight that sends your heart racing. You are looking at a large and ornate golden throne. Everywhere on its surface are elaborate designs made with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies.

Next to the throne is a wooden box with an open lid. The dust of ages has gathered on the contents of this box. Still, you can tell that it contains even more gold and precious gems.

Suddenly a snorted groan makes your blood run cold. You tear your gaze from the throne

and look beyond it to see an orc curled in the dirt, its back against the wall of the room, half dozing.

"Only an orc would sleep in the dirt," you think, "when it could sleep on this beautiful throne."

Orcs might not have good taste, but there is nothing wrong with their sense of smell. The monster's piglike nose starts to twitch. The orc abruptly sits up, sensing your presence.

Frantically, you look around for a place to hide. There is none.

You turn and flee, hoping you can make it back to Drawg's protection.

At first, you try to move quietly. Maybe the orc will think it only dreamed the smell of a cleric.

But soon a heavy pounding behind you tells you that the evil orc is in terrifyingly swift pursuit.

"Drawg!" you shout as you reach the ladder. "Orc!"

Breathless, you reach the top and find the fighter with his sword drawn.

Immediately the rest of you leap back from the opening, but Drawg remains planted there.

The orc pops through trapdoor.

"ARGHHH!" it screams, surprised at the sight of a large fighter waiting for it.

The orc, too, draws its sword, and the battle is joined.

You, Kyrel, and Pantel stay out of the way,

hoping that the furious clang of sword on sword does not reach the ears of any more of the evil orcs.

Finally, there is a thrust and a thwack of Drawg's sword, and the orc falls.

"Drawg win," says the fighter, putting his sword in its sheath.

"And I thank you," you say. "I think you will agree that what I found was worth fighting for. Come—all of you." You lead the other three through the trapdoor, down the tunnel, and into the treasure room.

"It is not the treasure we were sent for," you say, "but it will certainly do as well. I'm sure it is honorable to take such a treasure from these evil orcs. They could not have acquired it in a worthy way."

"Dangerous, too," Pantel says. "Loendal, are you sure you want to do this?"

Your high spirits suddenly collapse. Pantel had not meant to discourage you by reminding you of the danger, but that is what he has done. You are in a tunnel beneath a walled city filled with orcs. Can you possibly get this treasure back to Oon?

Perhaps it would be better to leave this treasure behind. If the Grand Oon sent you for the hobgoblin treasure, he must have had a reason. Perhaps the hobgoblin treasure is less dangerous than this one.

You look again at the treasure. It is worth risk, certainly—but how much risk, and what kind?

The others look at you, waiting for you to answer Pantel.

1) "Let's try to get away with what we can of this treasure," you say. Turn to page 117.

2) "I really think we'd better leave this treasure and go on to the hobgoblin lair," you say. Turn to page 104.

"Go, Drawg! Take the treasure!" you say. It is, after all, the Pech's own wish. The husky fighter shoulders the burden and walks reluctantly down the path, Pantel followng.

"Please, Loendal, save the Pech! I implore you!" Kyrel pleads.

"Follow Drawg," you tell the magic-user sternly.

You cannot bring yourself to look at the little Pech, who are staggering in the bright daylight, holding their hands over their huge eyes. Even though you are obeying their wish, it still seems cruel. But it is probably for the best.

But then—

"Stop!" you say. You cannot leave them behind. "Drawg, put down the chest."

"Good," Drawg says, obeying instantly. Kyrel, too, doesn't hesitate a moment before running back to the creatures.

Pantel looks for a moment at the treasure chest. Then he shrugs. "Why not?"

Please turn to page 79.

"There is no reward without risk," you say. "We will try to hide the treasure and come back for it after we have been to the hobgoblin cave."

You open your bedroll, take the jewels out of your pockets, and carefully wrap them up. Your comrades begin to hand over their gems as well.

Finally, your bedroll is a bulging treasure sack, which you roll up as best you can.

"There's a hollow tree over there," says Kyrel, pointing. "I noticed it when we arrived."

You stuff the fat bedroll into the tree and stand back and examine it. You don't think that anyone would notice it was there.

"On to the hobgoblin lair!" you say.

With light hearts caused by the success you've already found, you start back down the path. You talk happily about the kind of feast the Grand Oon will give to welcome you home.

It is your happy chatter that drowns out the sound of marching boots approaching you. When you look up, you see a war party. It is still too far away for you to know what manner of creatures there are in it, but when you use your Detect Evil Spell, a greenish glow indicating evil appears around them.

Suddenly some of them look toward you and shout.

"Run!" you cry. "They've seen us!"

Kyrel whirls and runs straight back along the path. Drawg and Pantel each leave the

path and start off cross-country. They appear to have the best chance of escape. But Kyrel needs your help. You turn and follow him.

But behind you, the rush of heavy boots grows louder. And you know you can run no faster.

Kyrel needs your help, but you will not be helping him.

The people of Oon need treasure, but you will not be bringing it because, at least for you, this is . . .

THE END

Kyrel translates your command, and immediately the tiny miners spring into action. They link their arms and chant together in their strange language.

The ape's grunting stops. The gnashing of its jaws slows and then ceases. The hand around your neck grows cold. With a start, you look and realize that the ape has turned to stone!

You wriggle out of its rigid fist and drop to the ground. As you gasp to try to regain your breath, you try to thank the little men for saving your life.

One of them speaks, and Kyrel translates: "No need to thank us. You have risked your lives for us."

"Now we will share our treasure with you," Kyrel translates for another. And the little people lead you back up the steep incline of the tunnel.

As you walk, one of the Pech relates the sad story of his people, and Kyrel translates: "We lived peacefully here in this hill for years. Then the hobgoblins somehow found out about our land, about our mine. They came and fought us and enslaved us. There were hundreds of us then, with many women and children. Now only the eight of us remain. Some were worked too hard, beaten too hard by the hobgoblins' apes. Others? Well, their hearts were broken at the loss of our beautiful way of life."

The Pech stop you and point out the

outline of a door cut into the seemingly solid stone wall.

"There are chambers behind this door where the hobgoblins live and sleep," one of them says. "They rarely come out during the day except to change the guard at the entrance and to feed the apes. But go silently past this door. We do not want them to hear us."

As quietly as you can, you creep past the door and proceed up the tunnel. As you near the entryway, the Pech seem increasingly nervous.

"What's wrong?" you ask Kyrel, who passes along the question.

Seven of the Pech turn to stare at the eighth. Elected to speak, he clears his throat, checks that Kyrel is ready to translate, and begins:

"Past the entryway, down the other branch of the cave, lies our kingdom's treasure room. We kept our special things there—carvings, jewelry, and ornamental dishes made by long-ago ancestors.

"After the hobgoblins came, no one was allowed into the treasure room. None of us is old enough to remember seeing the treasure. We have only heard about it. And I—I was given the key by my father." He lifts his chin to show a metal chain with a large gold key on it. You had not noticed it because of his long hair and his shaggy beard.

"He was king of the Pech. I would be king now—if there were still a kingdom." You hear

sadness in his voice, which Kyrel can't help but echo as he repeats the story. But then it brightens a bit. "We are very excited about seeing our treasure, but we are also very frightened. If we are caught, the hobgoblins will deal harshly with us."

"You safe. We help," Drawg says solemnly.

When Kyrel translates that, the little Pech, looking up and up at Drawg, seem to relax.

You head down the dry channel until a dim glow ahead tells you that you are approaching the treasure room. But even as that sight lifts your spirits, the noise you hear causes them to drop. Loud grunts and squeals remind you of the ape you saw heading down this path. You signal the party to stop.

"Can you use your spell to turn the ape to stone?" you ask.

The Pech spokesman shakes his head. "We cannot. The Flesh to Stone Spell can be used only once each day."

"Then Drawg will fight it," you say. You look at the fighter, who nods eagerly.

The look on Drawg's face convinces you that this fight has a special meaning for him. Under the hardness of his muscle, there is a soft heart touched by the sad stories of the Pech. Battling the ape will be a small revenge for the Pech's many sorrows, but it is something.

You believe what Drawg feels, because you feel it youself. You touch your slingshot and wish it were more useful.

Drawg draws his sword and steps inside the treasure room. The only sounds you hear are the quick rush of feet and one loud thwack. Then Drawg returns and beckons.

As you walk inside, your breath catches in your throat. Near your feet is the motionless ape. But your eyes are instantly drawn to a pile of gold nuggets taller than your head. Folded sacks piled in the corner tell you, if you had not already found out from the Pech, that this is where the ape was headed with the gold it took from their cart.

Even more impressive than the mound of gold, however, is a huge treasure chest that sits in the corner of the room. It is carved from gold, with many beautiful figures and rich patterns. Studded with rubies and emeralds, it is held to the wall of the cave by chains made of stone links. In itself the chest is a thing of beauty, but it conjures up images of great treasures locked within.

The Pech leader takes the key from around his neck and uses it to open a huge stone padlock on the chest. The other Pech crowd around it excitedly.

You gasp as the lid is thrown back, revealing huge gems and ornate jewelry. But the Pech ignore these and reach instead for cups, plates, and bowls that are carved from smooth and shining stone.

The Pech talk softly among themselves. Kyrel tells you that they are remembering the tales told of these pieces, whose ancestors

carved them, and how many, many years ago.

Their speech is soft, but when you hear the stomp, stomp, stomp of boots coming down the channel toward you, you wonder how much sooner you might have heard them had it been even softer.

You hiss for silence and let the sound of the boots reach every pair of ears in the cave.

"Pantel," you whsper, "go see what that is."

The thief nods and darts agilely to the mouth of the cave, where he keeps low to the ground, letting the dark stone hide him.

In a minute, he scurries back and reports, "There are three hobgoblin guards coming this way!"

"Are they headed for this room?" you ask.

Pantel nods quickly. "They must be," he says. "Beyond this cave, the channel narrows to nothingness."

"Then let's hide down there," you say.

One by one, you four and the Pech dash out of the treasure room and into the channel. As the channel narrows, it makes a bend sharp enough to conceal you and to muffle the sound of your voices.

"There will be trouble now," you say. "They'll find the ape, if they haven't already found the one who was turned to stone. We must leave here." You look at your three companions and then you look at the Pech. "All of us," you say firmly.

The Pech spokesman shakes his head when he hears Kyrel's translation. "We cannot

leave here," he says. "We cannot go outside."

"You can," you tell him. "You must! We cannot leave you here."

"Just take us back to the other tunnel," the Pech tells you. "The hobgoblins will know we did not harm the ape in the treasure room. We do not have swords. As for Mog, if he has not been discovered, we can turn the stone back to flesh tomorrow. If he has been discovered"—the Pech shrugs—"well, it is just a matter of time until our family of Pech vanishes. This will just speed up the process."

Kyrel continues to translate as fast as he can.

"We will take you back to the other tunnel somehow," you say, "and then we will leave and return with help as soon as we can."

"And the Golden Dragon?" the Pech asks. "What treasure will you take to appease it?"

"We will not take treasure," you say. "That would slow us down too much. We will leave without treasure and hurry back with more people to free you."

The Pech shakes his head. "You must not risk that. We Pech are doomed anyway. You must not endanger the land of Oon." He lifts a necklace of heavy gold and large rubies from the treasure chest and drapes it around your neck. "Take this to your dragon." Then he nods toward the mound of gold nuggets. "I only wish you could take the yellow metal to him, too."

You finger the necklace. "I thank you for this gift," you say, "and I will keep it. But we cannot take the gold. Once the hobgoblins discover our presence here, we will have to flee quickly."

Just then you hear a shout of alarm from the treasure room. The hobgoblins have discovered the ape! Then you hear the alarming clomp, clomp, clomp of boots receding up the channel. The underground lair will soon be teeming with hobgoblins. You must act quickly.

Your first wish is to free the Pech. But if they don't wish to go, do you dare risk precious moments trying to persuade them?

If not, you can leave without the treasure, to return as quickly as you can with a rescue party. But, of course, you can't be sure that you will actually return.

It is not a decision that you want to make, but make it you must.

1) If you accept the Pech's determination to stay and decide to leave without them, turn to page 152.

2) If you want to try to make the Pech go with you, turn to page 92.

"We must be true to our quest," you say. "We will carry your burden for you, Kyrel, if it grows too heavy. But we must march into Oon triumphant, carrying our bags of gold, because we HAVE triumphed. We have done well."

You look at your comrades. They are more than that, now. They are your friends. That is a treasure that only the four of you can appreciate.

Unlike the bags of gold, your friendship will not earn you the cheers of the people of Oon. But, you think, as you shoulder your two bags of gold and lead the way back to the path, for you the friendship you have earned may be the most important treasure of all.

THE END

The Grand Oon would tell you that the freedom of living creatures is more precious than any other treasure. You MUST help the Pech escape.

The little people come back down the tunnel and stand looking at you with their wide, pupilless eyes.

"We will help you to escape," you say, and Kyrel translates.

Immediately the eight Pech start chattering excitedly to each other in their booming language. Kyrel looks extremely flustered, even for Kyrel. You think it is because they are all talking at once, but then the magic-user hangs his head and says, "I'm afraid I have fed you some false information. The Pech refuse to flee."

"Refuse? I thought you said we could either fight the hobgoblins for them or help them to escape."

"Those thoughts came from me."

"Ask them why they won't escape."

"The daylight will doom them," Kyrel says. "They cannot see in sun."

Your glance falls on the miners' cart, and suddenly you have an idea. "Tell them to get in the cart and climb under the sacks. It will be nice and dark in there."

Kyrel translates, and the Pech look from him to you to the cart, but they do not move.

"Hide!" you command.

Immediately, all eight Pech dive into the cart and pull the sacks over their heads. You

feel just a little ashamed of yourself for using magical power on them. But there is danger in the tunnel, and you must hurry.

"Our biggest danger," you tell the others, "is at the entryway. There may be a new guard. If there is, we'll just get past him as best we can.

"Kyrel, you must stay with the Pech, no matter what happens. You're the only one who speaks their language. Understood?"

Everyone nods silently.

"Follow me," you say, and you head up the incline. You all push the cart ahead of you, but it would not move without Drawg's brawn.

All goes smoothly. The guard at the entryway has not been replaced. No one appears as you push the Pech-laden cart out of the hobgoblin lair into the bright world. You hurry around the hill, expecting at any moment to be pursued. But you are soon safely on the path that leads back to Oon.

"No treasure!" says Drawg sadly.

"No. No treasure," you agree, feeling a little disappointed at being headed home ransomless. Then a movement under the empty, dusty sacks betrays the presence of the Pech.

"Well, we do have treasure—a funny sort of treasure. Maybe it won't appease the Golden Dragon of Oon. But the Grand Oon will approve, I'm sure."

You smile as it occurs to you that this may have been the wisest decision of all.

THE END

"Pantel, you go on ahead and keep watch. We'll try to take the Pech back to their tunnel. Then we'll leave for Oon and bring a party back to rescue them."

The Pech leader opens his mouth to speak, but you silence him with a wave of your hand.

"Please do not argue," you say. "Our ruler, the Grand Oon, has taught us that there are riches other than gold, and more important ones as well. When we tell him your story, he will understand and send help. We will return."

Pantel darts ahead into the darkness of the tunnel. Your heart is beating very hard in your chest, but you feel as steady as the stone walls around you.

Fingering the necklace that hangs around your neck, you follow Pantel into the darkness.

You are certain that the next time you see this room, it will be with a party that has defeated the hobgoblins and freed the Pech.

THE END

"Very well," you say, "we will look for a way to get the treasure out of here." You turn to the fighter. "Drawg, you wait here with Kyrel. Pantel and I will go take a look around."

You and the thief creep silently through the tunnel and climb up the ladder into the huge stone building. You walk to one of the broken windows and look out.

"Hey, look!" exclaims Pantel, pointing.

You follow his finger and see a large cart standing behind one of the dirt huts.

"See? We move that cart over here and load the jewels in. Then we point it downhill toward the gate in the fence. Most of us get inside the cart and wait till someone opens the gate, then the other gives the cart a push to get it started, jumps in . . . and WHOOSH!—we roll right out of here."

You sink back and think about it for a moment. At first the plan seems so simple as to be dangerous, but . . .

"Why not? Let's try it," you say.

"Good job!" Pantel exclaims. He jumps to his feet and, quickly looking both ways, darts out the door and across the alley.

More cautiously, you follow him.

Each of you picks up one of the shafts that sticks out of the cart, and slowly you begin to pull it forward.

A piercing squeak fills the air, loud enough to be heard by the entire village. If the wheels of this cart have ever been greased, it has not been in recent memory.

"Let's get out of here!" Grabbing Pantel by the arm, you drag him across the alley, into the building, and back down into the tunnel.

"We're lucky no one heard it!" you say to your companions when you are back in the treasure room. "Well, I guess there's no easy way to get the treasure out. We either take it the hard way—carrying it through the orc village and over the palisade—or we leave it here and go after the hobgoblin treasure."

1) "Let's take what treasure we can and get out of here!" says the thief. If you agree, turn to page 117.

2) "In all likelihood, the hobgoblin dwelling will present fewer opportunities for our demise. I suggest we leave this treasure and go," says Kyrel. If you agree, creep out as quickly as you can, and walk on. Turn to page 96.

You hear muffled jolts and thuds as Drawg pushes Pantel out of his way and jumps out of the cart. The ape utters a scream and throws you at the fighter. You crash against Drawg, knocking him down. He shoves you hastily aside and pulls his sword.

"Run!" he tells you, as he rushes at the ape.

You do not wish to obey his command, but you know it is the right one. If you wait until it is over, all may be lost.

The only problem is the sunlight. You won't be able to escape if the little men are blinded by the sun.

"Get in!" you tell the Pech, grabbing the cart. "Pull the bags over your heads. The sun won't hurt your eyes, and we'll get you to safety."

Kyrel quickly translates your words, and the Pech obey. Kyrel, however, hangs back. So does Pantel. They have, you know, become as attached to the great, slow-moving fighter as you have.

"Drawg said RUN!" you remind them. Reluctantly, they turn to the cart and help you push it up the steep incline of the tunnel as fast as you can go. Your breath comes in gasps through your bruised throat.

Finally you reach the entrance to the lair. Miraculously the guard still has not been replaced. Scooting into the cover of the bushes, you head down the looping path that will lead you around the hill and then back home to Oon.

Once you are safely out of sight of the entryway, you collapse onto the grass, your breath coming in deep gasps.

"Do you think Drawg will make it?" the thief finally asks, trying not to sound worried.

"Of course he will!" you reply, trying to disguise your own doubts. And you all lie quietly.

Finally you hear the sound you are waiting for. Someone is crashing through the underbrush. It is not the hurried crashing of someone running for his life, just the clumsy sounds that an oversized fighter cannot avoid making.

Drawg emerges from the bushes. There is a red bruise rising on his forehead, but he is alive, and he is well. He smiles happily at the sight of you. "We go home now," he says.

You nod. It is time to go home. You look at the wooden cart. It is not filled with the kind of treasure you had hoped for. But helping the Pech find freedom has more value than gold could ever have.

Your heart lifts as a new thought strikes you: Perhaps these skilled miners will find treasure in Oon. Then no more treasure seekers will need to risk their lives.

You look at the three companions who risked their own lives with you on this journey and, in doing so, became your friends. Even without treasure, you know you have found success.

THE END

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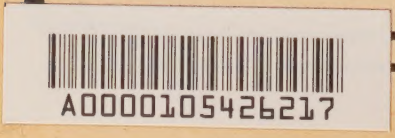

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